

ARGOSY

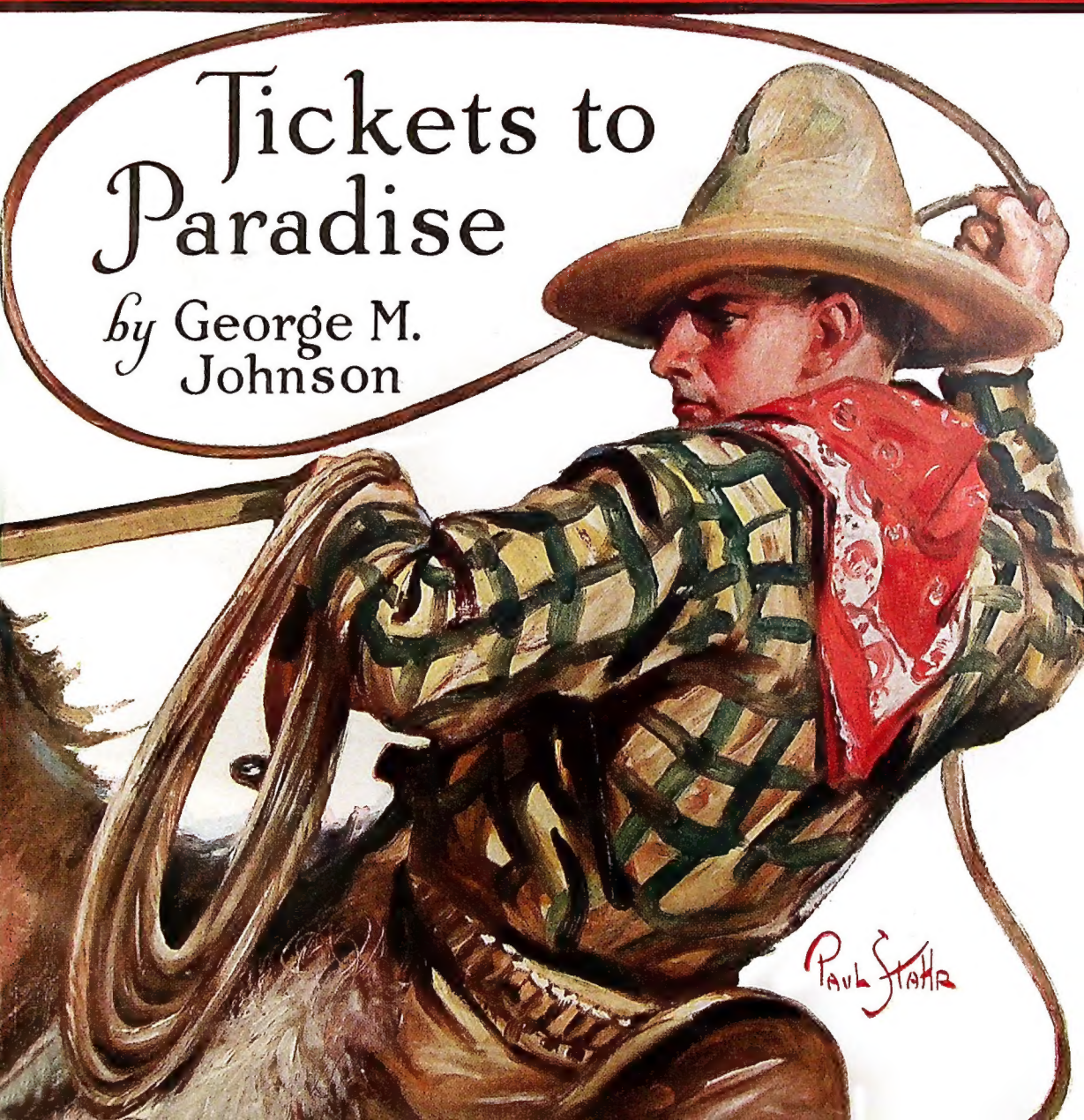
OCTOBER
1

ALL-STORY
WEEKLY

PRICE
10¢

Tickets to Paradise

by George M.
Johnson



"We are advertised by our loving friends"



Sons of Mr. C. Erickson, Jr., Ramona, Okla.

Mellin's Food—A Milk Modifier

The curd of cow's milk is made soft, flocculent and easily digested by the use of Mellin's Food as a milk modifier.

The sugar is increased by the addition of Mellin's Food and in a form well suited to an infant's digestion.

The mineral matter is supplemented by modifying the milk with Mellin's Food.

The mother who finds it necessary to feed her baby from the bottle and who selects Mellin's Food and milk for the purpose may thus be assured of digestible food composed of an ample supply of well-balanced nourishment.

*Write today for a Free Trial Bottle of Mellin's Food
and a copy of our book, "The Care and
Feeding of Infants"*

Mellin's Food Co., 177 State St., Boston, Mass.

If you're anxious to earn big money - here's your biggest opportunity for success

Carlton's Completeness of Line Guarantees You a Season of Big Profit



**DRESS SHIRTS
SPORT SHIRTS
WORK SHIRTS
FLANNEL SHIRTS
LUMBERJACKS
NECKWEAR
DRESS MUFFLERS
Fall and Winter Weight
UNDERWEAR
PAJAMAS**

Biggest Commissions

25%

Actually the commissions plus bonuses exceed 25%. Commissions are paid to you in advance. Carlton's Superiority, Variety and Completeness of Line enable you to run this 25% up to real big money. You have unlimited earning power. Make the most of it!

Bonuses in Addition



Bonuses too! Carltonians are given extra rewards with regularly paid bonuses in units up to \$300.00. Your daily earnings are thereby given a real boost. Full details of the liberal Cash Bonus Plan are outlined in your sales outfit.

40% Profit Sharing

Paid in addition to your commissions and in addition to your bonuses. The most amazing and far-reaching move in the Direct Selling Field. Explained in "Earn Big Money" that goes with outfit.



FREE: TRANSPORTATION AND FREE COLLAR

It costs us \$100.00 a year to prepay order shipments. But it is a saving to your customers! The latter is an additional sales feature with shirts priced from \$2.95... Collars are worth from 50c to \$1.00.



C. E. MANDEL, President
Carlton Mills, Inc.
114 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Mandel:
Send me this Free Carlton Outfit by return mail -- prepaid. I am ready to put The Carlton Line and your Big Money Earning guarantee to a test!

Name.....
Address.....
City.....State.....

THE Carlton Sales Outfit pictured above, is "Worth Its Weight in Gold" . . . these few words come nearest to describing a line that can actually pre-assure your success with it!

Featured within its covers -- ready for Fall and Winter, in the most complete, and as facts prove, the easiest to sell Men's Wear Line in America. .

Nine major business winning departments all closely related -- irresistible values -- count them!

...Backed by the one name -- "CARLTON" -- everywhere renowned for quality, respected for fair dealing and responsible for the tremendous earning power of its representatives.

No Experience Necessary **No Capital Required**

Through you, we reach an American market of 35,000,000 prospects. Ever new -- never exhaustible! . . . All you have to do is show our Sample Book -- quote our low prices and take orders without effort. We deliver, collect and guarantee satisfaction.

You are paid in cash daily. To those who are ambitious, we pay besides their big earnings, extra cash bonuses, and a 40% share in profits.

If you prefer, begin by devoting spare time -- your earnings will soon justify full time to this big money making proposition.

Complete Outfit FREE

Put it in Your Pocket and Put \$100.00 a Week in with it!

Upon receipt by us of special coupon to the right you will be promptly furnished with complete sample outfit -- prices -- order books, supplies and valuable selling helps.

The Carlton Outfit is by far the most elaborate selling kit in the field, and contains hundreds of beautifully mounted, large-size swatches of the actual merchandise. No wonder Carlton Representatives meet with immediate success. . . The book itself does the selling, while you do the order writing . . . and plenty of it!

Act Now.....via Coupon below

There is no time like "at once" when an opportunity such as this one presents itself to you. Fill in and mail the coupon -- your outfit will go forward by return post -- prepaid. In less than a week you will shake hands thankfully with the hand that wrote the coupon.

DISTRICT MANAGERS -- The completeness of the Carlton Line guarantees successful district manager control -- line up while desirable territories are still open for assignment. Write to-day to C. E. Mandel, President.



**carlton
MILLS INC.**

114 FIFTH AVENUE - NEW YORK - N.Y.

ARGOSY-WEEKLY

VOLUME 189

CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER 1, 1927

NUMBER 4

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FOUR SERIAL STORIES

Tickets to Paradise	George M. Johnson	481
A Three-Part Story—Part One		
King's Khaki	Will McMorrow	533
A Three-Part Story—Part Two		
The Sun Test	Richard Barry	563
A Six-Part Story—Part Three		
The Devil's Flower	John Wilstach	596
A Four-Part Story—Part Four		

ONE COMPLETE NOVELETTE

The Bully of Biscayne Bay	Loring Brent	498
-------------------------------------	------------------------	-----

FIVE SHORT STORIES

Buster	Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift	556
Dry Air	Arthur Evan James	582
The Enchanted Week	Howard Rockey	617
The Off Chance	Gordon Stiles	627
As Told by the Ramblin' Kid	Earl Wayland Bowman	635

POETRY

Indian Summer	L. Mitchell Thornton	532	Autumn Woods	Edgar Daniel Kramer	581
The Problem	Agnes Pearson	562	Scents	Peter A. Lea	626
Fraternity		Will Thomas Withrow	638		
The Reader's Viewpoint			639		

We must find out which. It's either

YOUR MAN OR MY GIRL.

GARRET SMITH

has wound the threads of several lives in a thrilling kidnaping
mystery, whose first installment appears next week.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and

LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE.,

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WILLIAM T. DEWART, President and Treasurer

RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Vice-President and Secretary

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IF YOU WERE FIRED TOMORROW

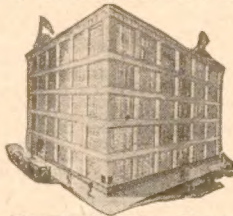
If the boss came down with a grouch—or you made a mistake—And You GOT FIRED, could you get another job at the same pay right away? Or would you have to go job-hunting like any ordinary untrained man who gets fired? Think it over! If you are tired of being a cog in a machine—or tired of working in an uncertain, 2x4-inch job with no future—here is a real opportunity! Read about it—it may be the big turning point of your whole career!



Stop Gambling With Your Future and LEARN ELECTRICITY

WHERE JOBS HUNT MEN AT \$50 A WEEK AND UP

LET me make you a real money-maker. Let me take you out of the "hired-help" class—and start you on the road to real success, in 90 days. Make up your mind to say good-bye forever to precarious, tiresome, routine jobs—crabby bosses—and low pay that can never be more than \$35 or \$40 a week! You don't need to tolerate them any longer!



Now in Our New Home
This is our new, fireproof, modern home wherein is installed thousands of dollars worth of the newest and most modern Electrical equipment of all kinds. We now have the largest amount of floor space devoted to the exclusive teaching of practical electricity in the world. Every comfort and convenience has been arranged to make you happy and contented during your training.

Amazing Opportunity

Electricity is calling for trained men—and Coyne 12-week graduates are among the preferred class. Many of them have stepped out of our doors into wonderful jobs paying from \$50 and up a week! And our free employment bureau gives life employment service.

LEARN Without Lessons

Electricity is surprisingly easy to learn this practical way *without* books or lessons. That's the secret of Coyne training. All training consists of **ACTUAL** and **PRACTICAL** work on fine big electrical equipment—dynamos, transformers, etc. (Real ones—not models). You learn by *doing*—and experts work right with you every step of the way.

COYNE
ELECTRICAL SCHOOL

H. C. LEWIS, President
Dept. 77-01
500-524 S. Paulina Street
CHICAGO, ILL.

No Experience or Advanced Education Needed!

Practically any man can master the "ins-and-outs" of Electricity—as taught in the Great Shops of Coyne. You don't need one bit of previous experience or any more than common-school education. Some of our highly successful graduates never completed eighth grade.

2 Extra Courses Included

If you act now—I'll not only allow your railroad fare to Chicago—but I'll include two big, extra courses absolutely without charge—**RADIO** and **AUTOMOTIVE ELECTRICITY**. I also secure part-time work for many students. **FREE** employment service after graduation, too. We help place men in wonderful jobs every week!

Send for FREE Book

Just give me a chance to tell you about the wonderful things that Electricity has in store for you after 12 happy weeks at COYNE. Send the coupon for my free, illustrated book containing over 150 photographs and details of my special offer. No obligation. Mail it today!

Big Book Free

Coyne Electrical School,
H. C. Lewis, Pres., Dept. 77-01
500-524 S. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Lewis:
Without obligation, send me your free illustrated catalog and details of your offer.

Name.....
Address.....
City.....State.....



Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rate in The Munsey Combination comprising:

Munsey's Magazine	} Combination Line Rate \$3.00 Less 2% cash discount
Argosy-Allstory Weekly	
Flynn's Weekly	
Minimum space 4 lines.	

Nov. 5th Argosy-Allstory Weekly Forms Close Oct. 8th

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

SELL PERSONAL CHRISTMAS CARDS. EARN \$75 TO \$100 WEEKLY, SELLING HERTEL PERSONAL CHRISTMAS GREETING CARDS. FULL OR SPARE TIME. WEEKLY PAY. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. \$10 OUTFIT FREE. THE JOHN A. HERTEL COMPANY, DEPT. 313, 318 W. WASHINGTON STREET, CHICAGO.

AGENTS—MONEY MAKERS. FAST READY SELLERS. Earn \$15 daily. Pay advanced, selling tailored \$10 value slickers \$2.95. Striking colors—exquisite cloths. Slicker and selling outfit FREE. FISK WARNER, 443 So. Dearborn, Dept. AF, Chicago.

Agents make larger profits selling well known Ho-Ro-Co Soaps, Perfumes, Toilet Articles. Our lower prices give larger profits. Over 50,000 cans La-Em-Strait Hair Dressing sold last year. HO-RO-CO, 2702 Ho-Ro-Co Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

MAKE \$45 TO \$100 WEEKLY—full or part time—and liberal bonus, selling BETTER QUALITY all-wool made-to-measure suits and overcoats. Have \$18.50 per suit. No experience necessary. Commissions paid in advance. We furnish handsome large swatch samples and complete instructions FREE. Write today! W. Z. GIBSON, 161 W. Harrison, Dept. K-409, Chicago.

AGENTS — \$250 MONTH. RAINCOATS. ALL COLORS. YOUR CHOICE \$2.65. PART TIME \$2 HOUR. COMPLETE LINE 60 PATTERNS. SILKS, SUEDES, TWEEDS, LEATHER-LYKE OUTFIT SENT FREE POSTAGE PREPAID. WRITE COMER MFG. CO., DEPT. 341-L, DAYTON, OHIO.

66 MILES ON ONE GALLON—Amazing. New. Wonderful Moisture Humidifier—Gas Saver—and Quick Starter. For all autos. Factory Agencies wanted everywhere. 400% profits. 1 Free to introduce. CRITCHLOW, C3-427, Wheaton, Ill.

Our superior proposition will net you \$100 a week, every week in the year. Equipment and car furnished. No capital or experience necessary. Immediate profits. Write today for particulars. AMERICAN PRODUCTS CO., 3577 Monmouth, Cincinnati, O.

SELL BY MAIL DURING SPARE TIME! Earn 90c profit on dollar orders. Our line consists of Books, Novelties, Bargains. Ready made Circulars at great savings. Large 48 page catalog FREE! U. ELFCO, 525 S. Dearborn St., Chicago.

\$30.00 A DAY GUARANTEED TO WORKERS taking orders for GOODWEAR tailored-to-measure clothes at sensational new low price. Tremendous assortment Virgin Wool fabrics. Biggest cash commissions paid daily, and special cash bonus besides, makes ours best-paying line in America. \$25.00 Sales Outfit Free. Exclusive Territory. Write at once to Dept. 220, GOODWEAR CHICAGO INC., 844 West Adams, Chicago.

FOUR \$7.50 SALES TO MERCHANTS NET YOU \$20.00 DAILY. SAVERS SYSTEMS EST. 1895—REF. DUN & BRADSTREET—2801 SHEFFIELD AVE., CHICAGO, ILL.

PHOTO MEDALLION AGENTS EARN \$20 DAILY. EASY WORK COLLECTING PHOTOS. BIG LINE. QUICK SELLERS. CAPITAL OR EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. GIVE YOU 4-DAY SERVICE ON BEAUTIFUL PHOTO REPRODUCTIONS. RESERVE YOUR DISTRICT TODAY. WRITE PUDLIN CORP., DEPT. 115, 259 BOWERY, NEW YORK.

TAKE ORDERS for coffee, flour, dried fruits, canned goods, meat, staple groceries, toilet articles, paints, tires, auto and tractor oils. No capital or bond required. We deliver and collect. PERMANENT BUSINESS. BIG PAY. Write at once. HITCHCOCK-HILL CO., Dept. 83, Chicago.

NEW INVENTION beats vacuum sweeper and all its attachments. Electricity unnecessary. All complete \$2.95. Over 100% profit. MORGAN, Mgr., 762 Grimes St., Fairfield, Iowa.

Men—Women, \$1.80 An Hour—No Less. Large Mfg. Co., Est. 30 years, starting new Medallion department. Amazing new sales plan. First 22 agents averaged \$1.80 an hour steady. Only 1 agent wanted in locality. Your own photo free as sample. Art Medallion Co., Dept. 50, corner Campbell and Jackson, Chicago.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

WE HAVE A CLEAN, DIGNIFIED OFFERING THAT IS A SURE-FIRE MONEY MAKER. MEN ON OUR SALES FORCE ARE WELCOME WHEREVER THEY GO. AND THEIR EARNINGS ARE SUBSTANTIAL. YOU CAN QUALIFY IF YOU'RE HONORABLE, STRAIGHTFORWARD, RELIABLE. We have a high-class offering and so want only HIGH-CLASS MEN. If you're such a man, write us. Address SALESMANAGER, 850 West Adams, Dept. 597, Chicago.

NEW HOUSEHOLD DEVICE washes-dries windows, sweeps, cleans walls, scrubs, mops. Costs less than brooms. Over half profit. HARPERS, 101 Third St., Fairfield, Iowa.

AGENTS MAKE \$10.00 DAILY SELLING NON-SPLASH WATER FILTERS ON SIGHT. BEST CANNASVER'S ARTICLE ON MARKET. Investigate. Write for particulars DESK 25, SEED FILTER COMPANY, 73 Franklin Street, New York.

NO DULL TIMES SELLING FOOD people must eat. Federal distributors make big money; \$3,000 yearly and up. No capital or experience needed; guaranteed sales; unsold goods may be returned. We furnish you with sample case, license and FREE SAMPLES for customers. Sure repeat orders. Exclusive territory. Ask now! FEDERAL PURE FOOD CO., R.2311 Archer, Chicago.

EARN \$80.00 WEEKLY WITH PARIS FASHION FROCKS FOR WOMEN. BIG LINE NEW STYLES AT FACTORY PRICES. BIG ADVANCE COMMISSIONS. NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY. NEW PLAN. FASHION FROCKS, DEPT. H-126, CINCINNATI, OHIO.

\$13.80 daily in advance (send for sworn proof) introducing New Insured Hosiery. 57 styles, 40 colors, guaranteed seven months. No capital or experience required. You simply take orders. We deliver and collect (or you can deliver, suit yourself). Credit given. **Pay You Daily**, monthly bonus besides. We furnish samples. Spare time will do. Milton Mathews, Road 27025, Cincinnati, Ohio.

\$95.00 WEEKLY EASY. SELL FAMOUS SINCLAIR COMFORT-BUILT SHIRTS DIRECT FROM FACTORY. STRIKING NEW PATTERNS—HIGH QUALITY FABRICS ASTONISHING EVERYONE. LOW PRICES CLINCH SALES. HANDSOME FREE SAMPLES IMMEDIATELY. SINCLAIR MFG. CO., DEPT. 740, 739N KINGSBURY, CHICAGO.

Agents Wanted—Fast selling article needed in every home. One agent made \$7.10 in 20 minutes. \$15.00 to \$20.00 a day easily made by good agents. If you qualify write for exclusive territory. Imperial Sp-cialty Company, 70 Seminary St., Norwalk, O.

WE PAY \$48 A WEEK. FURNISH AUTO AND EXPENSES TO INTRODUCE OUR SOAP AND WASHING POWDER. BUSS-BEACH COMPANY, Dept. A96, Chippewa Falls, Wisc.

Agents \$13 daily in advance. Bonus besides. Introduce finest line guaranteed hosiery you ever saw. 126 styles, colors. Spare time satisfactory. Auto furnished. No experience needed. Credit given. Samples furnished. Wilkitt Hosiery Co., Dept. 1599, Greenfield, O.

WILL YOU WEAR A PAIR OF GENUINE TAILOR-MADE SHOES AT MY EXPENSE? Will you show them to your friends and take their orders? I WILL ALSO SEND YOU FREE OUR BIG SELLING OUTFIT SHOWING 70 SHOE STYLES AND 60 ACTUAL LEATHER SAMPLES. I pay agents \$5.00 daily. Write quick. TAILOR-MADE SHOE SYSTEM, 932 Wrightwood, Dept. AE-10, Chicago.

Big Pay Every Day! Complete guaranteed line direct to wearer—dress shirts, work shirts, flannels, overalls, pants, leather coats, sweaters, play suits. \$10—\$25 daily! Experience unnecessary. Big Outfit Free. Nimrod Co., Dept. 55, 4922-23 Lincoln Ave., Chicago.

WONDERFUL NEW BATTERY COMPOUND CHARGES INSTANTLY. Eliminates old method. Batteries \$6.20. Antifreeze, better than Alcohol. Radiator Cleaning Compound. Other long profit specialties. MICKMAN CO., St. Paul, Minn.

MAKE \$25.00 DAILY SELLING COLORED RAINCOATS AND SLICKERS, RED, BLUE, GREEN, ETC., \$2.95. Hat Free. Commissions daily. Outfit Free. ELLIOTT BRADLEY, 241 VanBuren, Dept. AA-10, Chicago.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.



Make \$40 to \$100 a week in Auto "Up-Keep"

Any man who will take the trouble to expertly learn the mechanical and electrical end of automotive "maintenance" is **sitting pretty** these days. For **up-keep** has become the **BIG-MONEY** end of the great auto industry. They only build 3 million new cars a year, but there are 22 million autos, trucks, tractors, taxis and buses **TO SERVICE**.

Get away from the grease— BE AN AUTO EXPERT!

Garages, Service Stations, Repair and Electrical shops are looking for **EXPERTS**—men who are worth \$50 to \$100 a week. So I urge you to aim for the job **HIGHER UP**. Be foreman, manager or superintendent. Or go into business for yourself. **YOU CAN**—if you're only willing to devote a part of your spare time to learning.

LEARN AT HOME—

the quick, sure, easy way!

No studying, no memorizing, no trade courses—no lessons or examinations. Here is a better way. You don't have to keep a million facts in your head—if you know where to put your finger on them. Eleven noted auto engineers have prepared this material, 2,300 pages, over 2,000 blue prints, wiring diagrams and illustrations. In 5 big volumes. Jiffy-indexed for instant reference.

Start with the COUPON!

We'll loan you this **AMERICAN AUTO ENGINEERING LIBRARY** so you can see for yourself how other men **JUST LIKE YOU** have jumped to better-paid auto jobs. By occasional reading. By **LOOKING UP** the answer to problems as they arise in the day's work. By using our "question and answer" service. At a cost less than a fourth of the price of trade courses.

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY
Dept. A-710, Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Chicago

LOANED FREE!

American Technical Society,
Dept. A-710, Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Chicago, Ill.

Please loan me for 15 days, free, the 5 volume library of "Auto Engineering." I will pay the few cents delivery charges when books are received, and I have the privilege of returning them at your expense within 15 days, in which case I will owe you nothing. If I decide to keep them, I will send \$2. after 15 days, then \$3 a month until your special advertising price of \$24.80 is paid.

Name.....

Address.....

Attach a letter stating employer's and reference's names and addresses, or write same plainly in margin.

Don't send a Penny



An Ace!



New Model Pocket Ben

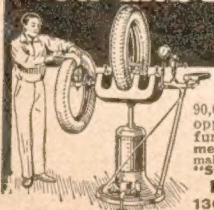
The New Model Pocket Ben is an ace among watches!

He's steady, reliable and unusually good-looking. That's why he's so popular.

Sold everywhere for \$1.50. With luminous night-and-day dial \$2.25.

WESTERN CLOCK COMPANY
La Salle, Illinois

You-and This New Machine Can Earn \$500 a Month



Operate a Tire Repair Shop

90,000,000 Tires in use. America's greatest opportunity for men with small capital. We furnish everything—\$100 and up. **Easy payments.** We train you **FREE** right at home. Start making money at once. Write today for **Free Book "Steps to Success."**

Haywood Tire Equipment Co.
1303 South Oakley Chicago, Illinois

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

NEW! AMAZING "TWIN" INVENTIONS! Automatic can opener lifts out lid, clean, smooth, at the turn of a crank! Magic-Groove sharpener puts razor edge on all knives, scissors, tools. Combination works from same wall bracket. You make \$1 to \$2 on every sale—\$60 to \$120 a week easy! Send quick for manufacturer's **FREE TEST OFFER**. **CENTRAL STATES MFG. CO.**, Dept. M-1171, 4500 Mary Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

AMAZING NEW SCIENTIFIC INVENTION making agents \$15-\$20 daily; kitchen necessity; dollar seller with big profit; sell two or more every call. **COOKING DISC CO.**, T-163 E. Superior, Chicago.

AGENTS—WE START YOU IN BUSINESS AND HELP YOU SUCCEED. NO CAPITAL OR EXPERIENCE NEEDED. SPARE OR FULL TIME. YOU CAN EASILY EARN \$50-\$100 WEEKLY. WRITE MADISON MANUFACTURERS, 564 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

AGENTS MAKE BIG PROFITS SELLING LINGERIE, HOSIERY, RAINCOATS AND SWEATERS direct to wearers. 300 Styles. Special Selling Plan. Write for Special Offer. **NATIONAL TEXTILE MILLS, 218 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago.**

DO YOU WANT AGENTS AND SALESMEN TO SELL your merchandise? Men and women who are educated in personal salesmanship and know the house-to-house, office, and store canvassing proposition. These advertisers are getting them year in and year out, and there are thousands more for you among the readers of the Munsey Magazines. Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, Munsey Combination, 230 Broadway, New York.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. WE COMPOSE MUSIC. OUR COMPOSER WROTE MANY SONG HITS. MONARCH MUSIC COMPANY, 236 West 55TH ST. (NEAR BROADWAY), DEPT. 109, NEW YORK.

MICHIGAN FARMLANDS FOR SALE

\$10 IS ALL I ASK DOWN ON 20 ACRES IN MICH. POTATO BELT. Very easy terms. Near markets, lakes and streams. Write for particulars now. **G. W. SWIGART, M-1276 First National Bank Building, Chicago.**

MANUSCRIPTS WANTED

WRITERS! SELL YOUR STORIES, POEMS, Descriptive Articles, Plays, Etc. Submit Mss. or write to **WRITERS' SYNDICATE, 612, Hannibal, Mo.**

MISCELLANEOUS

LAND FREE IF PLANTED TO BANANAS. BANANAS BEAR A FULL CROP THE SECOND YEAR. \$5.00 monthly will plant five acres, which should pay \$1,500 profit annually. Reliable companies will cultivate and market your bananas for 1-3. Bananas ripen every day and you get your check every 90 days. For particulars address **JANTHA PLANTATION CO., Empire Building, Block 470, Pittsburgh, Pa.**

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED

\$\$\$ FOR PHOTOPLAY PLOTS. STORIES ACCEPTED ANY FORM. Revised, criticised, copyrighted, marketed. Estab. 1917. Booklet free. **UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CO., 209 Western & Santa Monica Bldg., Hollywood, Calif.**

TOBACCO, ETC.

TOBACCO HABIT BANISHED. NO MATTER HOW LONG YOU HAVE BEEN A VICTIM, no matter how strong your craving, no matter in what form you use tobacco, there is help for you. Just send postcard or letter for our **Free Book.** It explains everything. **NEWELL PHARMACAL CO., Dept. 812 Clayton Station, St. Louis, Mo.**

"SURELITE," The New Vest Pocket Lighter. Lights cigarettes, cigars, stoves or gas in strongest wind. New principle of ignition surpasses all others. Guaranteed for 10 years. Sent postpaid for \$1. **SURELITE CO., Great Kills, S. I., N. Y.**

HELP WANTED

EARN \$25 WEEKLY, SPARE TIME. WRITING FOR NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. DETAILS AND COPYRIGHT BOOK FREE. PRESS SYNDICATE, 997, ST. LOUIS, MO.

WANT WORK AT HOME? Earn \$18 to \$80 a week **RETOUCHING** photos. Men or women. No selling or canvassing. We teach you, guarantee employment and furnish **WORKING OUTFIT FREE.** Limited offer. Write today. **ARTCRAFT STUDIOS, Dept. 71, 3900 Sheridan Road, Chicago.**

MAKE MONEY IN PHOTOGRAPHY. Learn quickly at home. Spare time or full time. New plan. Nothing like it. No experience necessary. Write for particulars. **AMERICAN SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHY, Dept. 1455, 3601 Michigan Ave., Chicago.**

YOU ARE WANTED. U. S. Government Jobs. \$95.00 to \$250.00 month. Men—women, 18 up. Steady work. Common education sufficient. 25 coached free. Write today sure. **FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. P1, Rochester, N. Y.**

HELP WANTED—MALE

EARN \$120 TO \$250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID, AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. WE SECURE POSITION FOR YOU AFTER COMPLETION OF 3 MONTHS' HOME STUDY COURSE OR MONEY REFUNDED; EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES. WRITE FOR FREE BOOKLET CM-30. STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INST., BUFFALO, N. Y.

MEN, GET FOREST RANGER JOB; \$125—\$200 MONTH, and home furnished; permanent; hunt, fish, trap. For details, write **NORTON, 242 McMann Bldg., Denver, Colo.**

GOVERNMENT SPECIAL AGENTS (INVESTIGATORS), FOREST RANGERS, PROHIBITION AGENTS needed often. Commence \$125 to \$250 month. How To Qualify, mailed Free. Write, **OZMENT, 198, St. Louis, Mo.**

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, (white or colored), sleeping car, train porters (colored), \$150—\$250 monthly. Experience unnecessary. **836 Railway Bureau, East St. Louis, Ill.**

MEN WANTING OUTDOOR WORK, qualify for forest ranger position. Start \$125 month; cabin and vacation; patrol the forests; protect the game; give tourists information. Write **MOKANE, Dept. M-12, Denver, Colo.**

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

LADIES—\$8 DAILY EASY. Demonstrating wonderful new guaranteed sanitary belt and protector. High grade—low priced. Capital or experience unnecessary. Belt and Protector Free. **HEALTH-TEX CORP., Chicago.**

EDUCATIONAL

YOU read these little advertisements. Perhaps you obtain through them things you want; things you might never have known about if you had not looked here. Did it ever strike you other people would read your message—that they would buy what you have to sell; whether it is a bicycle you no longer need, a patented novelty you desire to push, or maybe your own services? Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, Munsey Combination, 230 Broadway, New York.

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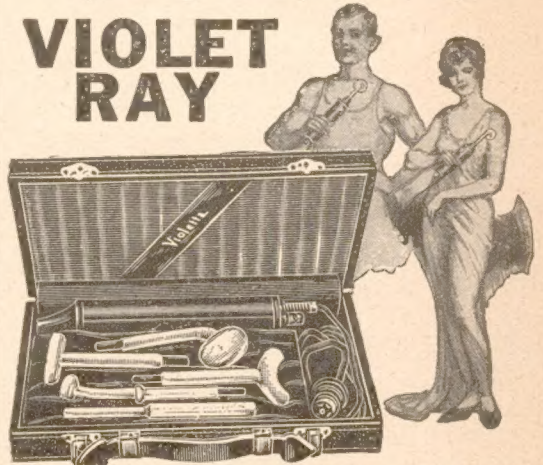
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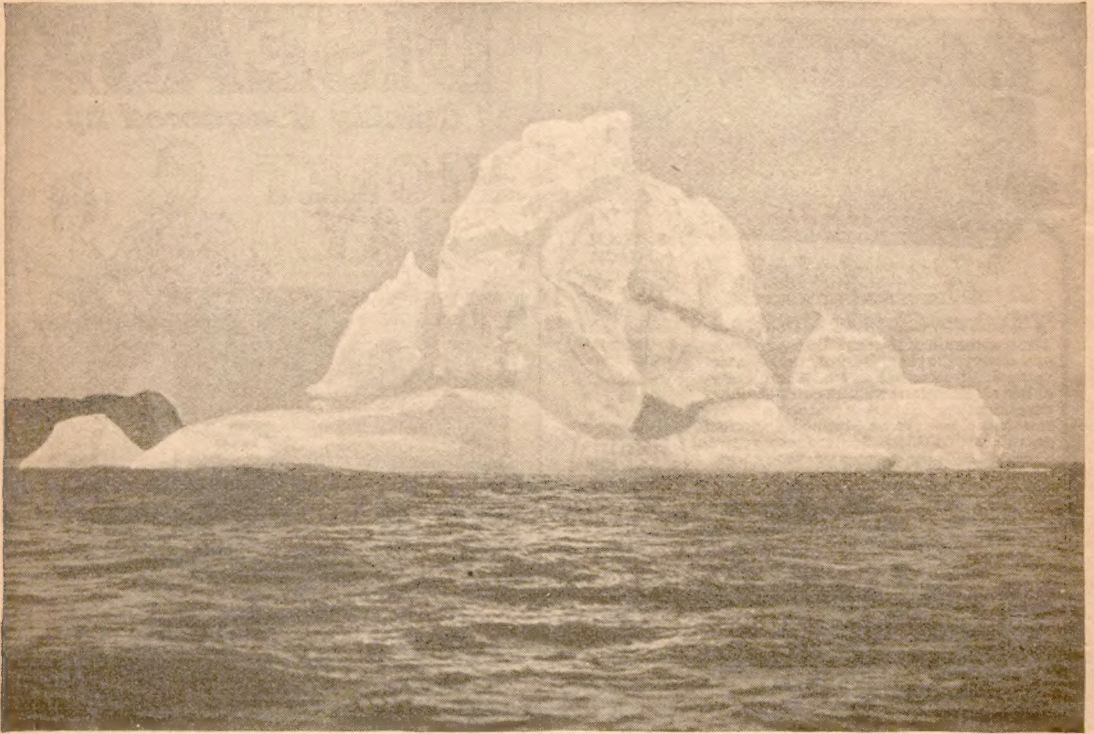
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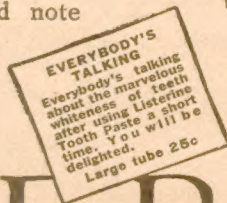
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VOLUME 189

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1, 1927

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Tickets to Paradise

By **GEORGE M. JOHNSON**

Author of "Nevada Gold," "The Range Rider," etc.

INTRODUCTION

In which are quoted certain extracts from
the will of Joseph Lamberton, deceased.

IN addition to these aforementioned bequests I do hereby give and bequeath to my nephew, Hugh Lamberton, the sum of \$20,000 (twenty thousand dollars), now standing to my credit at the Drovers' Bank, in the town of Bald Butte.

Furthermore, I do give and bequeath to my beloved niece, Janice Lamberton, the ranch lying on the south fork of Box Elder Creek, generally known as the Boxed J L, together with all buildings, equipment, horses, cattle, and everything in any way connected with said ranch, including the right to register in her own name the brand belonging thereunto, viz: **LL**

Inasmuch as Janice Lamberton is not yet of legal age, I hereby direct that management of this property be vested in her cousin Hugh, who shall act as trustee during her minority, receiving each year in return for his services fifty per cent (50%) of all net profit accruing from the business. When Janice Lamberton reaches the age of twenty-one, the ranch shall pass into her full possession without encumbrance, and thereafter all responsibility of management shall devolve upon her, or such person or persons as she may choose.

It is furthermore my dying wish that Janice eventually marry Martin Sandisfield, Jr., son of my former comrade. I should not make this solemn request a part of my last will and testament were I not assured that Martin Sandisfield is in every way a worthy son of a worthy father.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOSS OF BALD BUTTE.

MR. MARTIN SANDISFIELD, JR., finished off the last of a belated breakfast complacently, as one well pleased with himself and the world at large. Thoughtfully he tipped back from the table to ease the sense of repletion born of an over-hearty meal, grooming his firm white molars with a quill toothpick.

This genteel task concluded to his satisfaction, Mr. Sandisfield replaced the implement in his vest pocket, selecting from another pocket a corpulent cigar, which he clipped and lighted. He blew a series of smoke rings, lazily watching as the nebulous spirals drifted upward toward a restaurant ceiling.

Sandisfield deserves a word or two of notice by way of introduction, since the position he held in the town of Bald Butte was one of considerable importance. Thanks to the indomitable industry of a persevering father, who prior to the advent of the railroad had built up a vast freighting business in that portion of the West, Martin Sandisfield, Jr., found himself removed from the need of toiling for his daily bread.

He had used shrewdly the influence gained through this inherited wealth, to the point where for all practical purposes his word was law in Bald Butte. The rôle of despot pleased him, gratified his inordinate vanity, and in some measure prevented time from hanging heavy on his hands.

A casual observer would have perceived in Sandisfield merely a heavy-set, florid-faced individual, whose expressionless face defied attempts to penetrate below the surface. Though his features were regular and not unprepossessing, one who saw with more discernment might have noted that he missed being actually good looking by a very narrow margin: his eyes, almost colorless, were just a shade too small and were set just a shade too close together.

Not so many years before, Martin Sandis-

field could have been classed as athletic in build, but now the results of good living were beginning to be manifest in softened, pudgy muscles and a faint, yet unmistakable paunch. This last item was concealed in part by the skill of his tailor, since Sandisfield dressed with meticulous attention to detail, favoring the more formal type of Western attire for town wear. When occasion required that he ride abroad on the range his garb was what the conventions required of a prosperous ranchman.

The morning was already well advanced when Sandisfield concluded breakfast, but for a time he lingered at the table in idle enjoyment of his cigar. The arrival of Charlie Rand, proprietor of a local saloon, interrupted his musings.

"Hello, Chass," was Sandisfield's affable greeting.

"Hello, yourself," Rand grinned. "What meal's this you been consuming—breakfast or dinner? Good thing for you your dad wasn't afraid of hard work."

Sandisfield dismissed the impeachment with a careless wave of his hand.

"How's the cash coming in for the big show?" he inquired, referring to festivities planned in honor of Bald Butte's approaching twenty-fifth anniversary. Rand was in charge of the war-chest.

"Everything's fine, Mart. Folks in town certainly came across with a bang, glad to help put the old burg on the map."

"Got a plenty, do you think? I can dig a little deeper without stretching the bank roll till it snaps."

"They'll mebbe be a deficit when we're all through and know how it stands," Rand said. "Things like this generally run in the hole by the time the account's closed. I've got you down as underwriter."

"Fair enough," Sandisfield chuckled. "Guess I can stand it. By the way, Chass, did you connect with the Denver orchestra I recommended for our dance? I've a special reason for wanting that hop to touch only the high spots."

"Leave it to me, Mart," Charlie Rand assured him. "That there baile will be what Eastern papers would term the crowning social event of the season." He winked significantly at his companion. "And I guess I know who's your special reason. Don't blame you at all, Mart. You've got a good eye when it comes to picking 'em. Congrats in order yet?"

"A little previous, mebbe, Chass," Sandisfield replied. "But there's lots of time."

"Sure," Rand agreed readily. Then, after a pause: "Seen Cousin Hugh this morning?"

"No. What's up?"

"He was looking for you awhile ago. Last I saw of him he was headed toward your office. He's a great lad, is Hugh Lamberton. Only they's one important lesson he ain't learned; poker and whisky don't mix worth a plugged copper. But at that it's none of my business."

"Hugh oiled last night, was he?" Sandisfield queried in languid interest.

"Was he oiled!" Rand's grunt was highly expressive. "I'll say he was! But you'd never suspect it to see him this morning. He's as chipper and fresh as if he'd slept ten hours. I believe in giving a fellow all the credit he's got coming, and Hugh Lamberton certainly can get over the effects of his liquor almighty sudden. Wish I knew how he does it. If I'd absorbed the punishment he did last night I'd be dead to the world for the next twenty-four hours."

Sandisfield rose from his chair.

"Likely Hugh's waiting for me down at the office," said he. "I might as well drift along that way and find out what's on his mind. See you again, Charlie."

"Adios, Mart. Tell the young lady that we'll have the best dance music west of Chicago—and all on her account."

"I'll tell her, Chass," Sandisfield laughed as they parted. "That ought to make a big hit."

Still laughing, he left the restaurant, and steered a leisurely course toward his business headquarters. Devious thoughts filled the mind of Martin Sandisfield as his heels echoed hollowly on the plank walk.

"Hugh Lamberton's a damned fool," was

the substance of these musings. "But a fool and his folly make a combination that any wise man can use to his advantage—if he wants to. What would the world be without its annual sucker crop?"

Sandisfield had left the door of his office unlocked before going to breakfast, and was accordingly not surprised to find Hugh Lamberton installed there quite as if the place belonged to him—tipped back in a comfortable swivel chair, boot heels elevated to the desk, and one of his host's excellent cigars projecting from the corner of his mouth at a rakish angle.

"Hello, Mart!" he called jovially, expelling a cloud of smoke. "'Bout time you were showing up."

Sandisfield shot his caller a swift, appraising glance. No one would have suspected that this was a "morning after" for Lamberton. His face was smooth shaven, his eyes clear, and nerves steady. Yet Charlie Rand vouched for the fact that a few hours before, Hugh had been thoroughly lubricated. Sandisfield shook his head, as one who passes up a hopeless riddle.

"How do you do it?" he grumbled, voicing a grudging admiration.

Hugh grinned sardonically.

"It's a gift, Mart," said he.

"Must be," Sandisfield conceded. "What do you want, anyway?"

"About three thousand— U-m-m! No, better make it thirty-five hundred."

"Humph!" Sandisfield snorted. "Got to you again, did they! Whoever told you you could play poker?"

"Save that for the coroner," Lamberton chuckled, wholly unabashed. "What I need now is cash, not a sermon."

"How much of your paper do I hold? You any idea?"

"Why, sure. I know to a penny. Twelve thousand, ain't it? And this last brings the merry total up to fifteen, five hundred."

"When you aiming to pay it back?"

"Why, to be perfectly frank with you, Mart," Hugh Lamberton replied engagingly, "chances are I'll never pay it back. What the hell do you care about a beggarly fifteen thousand? What's the matter? Getting tight all of a sudden?"

Sandisfield savagely bit the end off a fresh cigar.

"I'm not beefing about the money," he snapped, "but I'm sick of being the goat whenever you let a quart of rotten whisky blunt your poker sense. It's only on Janice's account I've been decent with you so long."

Lamberton's eyes narrowed the merest trifle.

"I'm giving Janice part of the credit," he said, "but most of it rightly belongs some place else—my knowing that you're so familiar with the private entrance to one or two gay joints in town. We savvy each other, Mart. Damned well, too. I ain't blind to facts that a certain party don't even dream they exist. What chance would you have with my fair cousin if I tipped her off to the kind of dames you've been trotting around with? Put that in your pipe and take a good long draw on it."

"Think you've got me, do you?" Sandisfield snarled, his florid face reddening still more in a blaze of passion. "How long do you think I'll stand for this leg-pulling stunt?"

"Forget it, Mart!" Lamberton told him with a shrug of his shoulders. "I'm a reasonable man, and I'm not bleeding you excessive, all things considered. You can afford it easy. Ain't Janice worth a few dollars now and then?"

"Of course she is!" Sandisfield agreed, cooling off a trifle. "It's the principle I'm kicking about. I hate like hell to be held up."

"Nobody's holding you up, Mart," Lamberton observed mildly. "I never made any threats, did I?"

"You better not!" and Sandisfield's tone was again savage. "As it happens I'm in a position to do a little of that myself. You're pulling a baby game—the pot calling the kettle black."

"Just what's back of that remark?" Hugh demanded coolly.

"Just this," Sandisfield replied with equal coolness: "that I can send you to State's prison any time I take a notion."

A little of Lamberton's nonchalant bravado vanished; a shade of uneasiness glowed

momentarily in his eyes. Yet he laughed in good natured derision.

"That's a hot one, Mart!" he jeered. "Tell another."

"I've been checking up on you, young fellow," Sandisfield went on remorselessly, "and I've learned a lot. In the five years since Joe Lamberton died you've blown the twenty thousand he left you, twelve thousand I contributed, what you took from the supposed Boxed J L profits—and about twenty thousand besides, more or less, though probably more."

"You're raving," Hugh said, with a pretense of indifference that did not deceive his companion. "Where would I get any extra twenty thousand?"

"You stole it!" Sandisfield declared shortly.

"That's a lie, you skunk!" Lamberton frothed, his *sang froid* wholly gone. One hand rested on the butt of the .45 slung at his hip.

"Cut out the rough stuff," Sandisfield advised him coldly. "Things have come to a show-down between you and me, and we might as well put our cards on the table."

"I never stole any money," Lamberton repeated doggedly.

"No?" There was a sharp edge to the speaker's voice. "Might be you've got another name for it, which don't alter the facts a lot. How about the two thousand steers you shipped from the pens at Baker's Siding last fall? Forget to include the receipts in the annual report of business done? And how about the faked statements you've been getting from that crook pardner of yours at the stockyards—one set for yourself and one for the estate? You didn't steal any money from Janice! Oh, no! Not cash money, just steers!"

In the face of this damning charge Lamberton was silent, his eyes unable to meet the accuser's.

"You're a fine sort of chap," Sandisfield resumed. "You're the legally appointed trustee of an estate, and you misappropriate funds from it for your own use. And you were fool enough to think you'd get away with murder like that! It's hard to beat!"

At this instant Hugh Lamberton did not present an appealing picture: he was merely the rogue, horribly frightened at the sudden discovery that his roguery, which he believed to be cleverly concealed, was known. Sandisfield's glance showed hearty contempt for this weakness, rather than disapproval of the crooked work.

"What you going to do about it, Mart?" Lamberton mumbled. He voiced no further denial of guilt, knowing that denial would be useless. "You ain't said anything to Janice?"

"Not yet I haven't," Sandisfield assured him. "Might be I won't at all. I mentioned the matter now because you were getting altogether too cocky about my private business, and to let you know I don't pay your poker losses because I'm afraid of you. I'll admit I'd just as lief Jan didn't know all there is, but I could probably slip around it some way or other, while you'd have one hell of a job getting out of the mess you're sewed up in."

Sandisfield was silent for a moment; when next he spoke his voice fairly oozed unctuous benevolence. "Janice would feel pretty bad to learn that the chap who's been like a brother to her was a crook, and I'd like to spare her that. So mebbe we'll let the thing ride—for a spell."

"What's the price?" Lamberton spoke up shrewdly. He knew Martin Sandisfield too well to be deluded by vain hopes of obtaining his immunity for nothing.

"That's the stuff!" Sandisfield applauded. "We're beginning to understand each other better and better. Here's what's in my mind. Between you and I, Hugh, I ain't making the progress with Janice that I'd like to. We get along so so, but when it comes right down to sentimental dealings Janice is kind of cold. I can't put my finger on the exact trouble, but it's there. Sometimes I've thought she didn't quite trust me."

"Can you blame her?" Lamberton observed cynically. Convinced that his misdeeds had a fair chance of going unpunished, the man's characteristic free-and-easy manner was again asserting itself. Sandisfield saw fit to ignore the interruption.

"You've got quite a lot of influence with

Janice," he went on, "just the same as you had with the old man. Janice is like him some ways; ready to think the best of people and overlook the worst. What I want is for you to use your influence in my favor. You're with her a lot, and if the thing is worked properly you can swing her around my way. You want to avoid the mistake of laying it on too thick, or even an unsuspecting girl like Jan might smell a rat. Get me, Hugh?"

"Oh, yes, I get you," Lamberton replied. "Probably I can help you. What's in the game for me if I do?"

"Why, this business of Janice's estate won't ever come up to plague you, for one thing. And we'll forget about the little loans I make you from time to time. Also, as a member of the family, I'll be glad to help you out now and then in the future—anything within reason."

"That's a fair break," Lamberton admitted. "But suppose things slip. Janice is independent in her views, as you likely know well. I might find that she's not taking kindly to the notion of being Mrs. Martin Sandisfield, Jr. What then?"

"That would be tough on you, my boy," Martin informed him with a sad, sweet smile.

"What do you mean?" Hugh snapped uneasily.

"There are just two alternatives to this proposition," Sandisfield said. "Either I marry Janice Lamberton, or you face the music for milking the Boxed J L ranch while acting as trustee of the estate. You can take your choice."

"But that's no square game," Hugh protested hastily. "Mebbe all I can do won't bring her around. Don't I get anything better than a jab in the eye with a sharp stick for my trouble?"

Sandisfield laughed unfeelingly.

"That's a good way to put it," said he. "Point is, Hugh, that I don't trust you too far. You ain't got any more sense of honor than a locoed steer, and I need a husky lariat to keep you tethered. It's always been a mystery to me how Joe Lamberton ever set such store by you."

"Humph!" Hugh grunted contemptuously. "How about yourself? You had

him buffaloed as much as I did. Me—I couldn't understand why Uncle Joe put that business of you marrying Janice in his will. The old gent was sort of blind to a lot of things toward the end."

"Fortunately for both of us," Sandisfield put in smoothly. "But all this is aside from the point. I've stated the issue as it stands, and the cards go as dealt. You do your part, and things will be rosy for each of us."

"Janice thought the world of her uncle, and the fact that he wanted her to marry me can't help but guide her decision. A word or two from you at the right instant will be another push. For my part, I expect to show her a wonderful time at the big dance, and, everything considered, I ought to be sitting pretty. Plenty of girls would be tickled to grab me for a husband," he added modestly, "and Jan ain't any exception to the general run. Girls are pretty much all alike."

"Hate yourself, don't you!" Lamberton observed sourly. "Here's a bit of advice I'm handing out for your own good—and mine. You own a rotten temper, and if you want to win Janice you'd best keep it well hidden until after the wedding. If she ever sees you in the condition I have once or twice, just kiss your chances goodbye. One thing more. Don't get too intimate with the dance-hall janes from now on. Janice has ideas about that sort of thing. It might get to her. Savvy?"

"Both your points are well taken," Sandisfield said. "But I'm not quite a fool. Don't worry about my end of the proposition. You've got an assignment of your own to look after."

For a fleeting instant a look of uncertainty—almost of misery—lurked in Hugh Lamberton's eyes and on his weak face.

"I'm a fine guy, I am," he said bitterly, "to help you snare a girl like my Cousin Janice—a fine guy! You're not fit to touch her."

"Rather late in the day for such heroic sentiments, isn't it?" Sandisfield sneered.

"Yes," Hugh assented, "too late. What the hell can I do? You've got me where the hair is short." He laughed jarringly. "Give me a drink, Mart."

Sandisfield silently produced glasses and a bottle.

"Here's to the bride!" Lamberton called, and poured his liquor down.

"To the bride, God bless her!" Sandisfield echoed, emptying his own glass.

With that formality out of the way, he produced his check book in businesslike fashion.

"Suppose I make this one for four thousand, Hugh?" he inquired. "Five hundred extra will give you a little pocket money—after settling accounts."

"Good enough, Mart!" and a covetous gleam betrayed Lamberton's interest as he watched his companion fill out the amount. Sandisfield deliberately blotted the ink, ripping the narrow slip of paper from his check book.

"Here you are, Hugh!" Then, meaningly: "You understand?"

"Sure, I know the synopsis by heart," was Lamberton's flippant reply. "Adios, Mart," and hastily he departed from the office.

No change of expression passed over Sandisfield's features as he watched him go, merely a shrug of the shoulders indicating amusement and contempt.

"A fool and his folly!" muttered Martin Sandisfield, Jr.

CHAPTER II.

MEET BOB KENWORTHY.

ON a certain glorious morning of a day in early summer Mr. Martin Sandisfield, Jr., went riding forth on the range, headed for the Boxed J L ranch, where he looked forward with keen anticipation to some hours spent in the charming company of Janice Lamberton, its fair owner.

This was an occasion when it pleased the boss of Bald Butte to be appareled in typical cowboy garb, yet few range riders could have afforded equipment so luxurious and costly as Sandisfield. From the top of his jauntily peaked pearl-gray Stetson to the toes of his nobby high-heeled boots our rider fairly radiated splendor.

Martin deserved to rank as an expert

horseman and, to give the fellow due credit, he made a striking figure in the saddle—a fact of which he was not unaware. His mount was an unusually fine animal, jet-black in color, bred from a judicious mixture of wild mustang and blooded Eastern stock.

Recent rains had carpeted the grassland with a host of tiny white flowers, which peeped up in shy modesty as the rider passed, adding their little quota to the natural beauties of the range. In the near distance a castellated butte towered aloft in solitary grandeur, its strata marked with bands of brightly tinted sandstone, red and yellow chiefly predominating.

A geologist could have told you that in the dim past, long before mankind walked the earth, these sandstone layers had extended far over the entire region, slowly to be removed by the tireless, never-ending work of erosion until only the butte was left.

A philosopher might have seen in this remnant of bygone ages a monument to the resistless lapse of time, moralizing therefrom a solemn warning on the barren futility of human ambitions and the hopelessness of human dreams.

An artist would have exclaimed in delight at the remarkable play of colors afforded by the gleam of sunlight on the rock strata, set off by the deep azure of the cloudless sky above.

Martin Sandisfield was, however, neither a geologist nor a philosopher, and certainly there was within him small appreciation for the artistic. Thoughts along the lines suggested above did not occur to him, and he rode onward with eyes wholly blind to all beauties of the landscape.

His horse wore a bridle equipped with an unusually savage type of bit, though all cowboy bits are instruments of torture, designed to aid the rider in curbing the frantic plunges of a dangerous broncho. It should be added that the average puncher is disinclined to use this weapon save when justified by the exigencies of his calling, usually riding with the bridle reins slack so that the tender portions of his cayuse's mouth are relieved from painful pressure.

The true cow-puncher feels a sense of

responsibility for the welfare of the animal he rides, often treating his faithful pony as a trusted friend and comrade. The range rider's trade is at times a cruel one, but rarely does he make it more harsh than stern necessity requires.

This was not true as concerned Martin Sandisfield, who saw in a horse merely a convenient machine for transportation, to be used or abused as suited the whim of its owner. Sandisfield was of a type utterly merciless when dealing with his fellow men, regarding any evidence of tenderness or compassion as an indication of weakness. It is vain to expect such an individual to show consideration for the unfortunate dumb brutes whose master he is.

Sandisfield invariably rode with the bridle reins pulled taut, keeping his horse in a constant state of irritation and fretfulness, so that more commonly than not a bloody froth flecked the animal's jaws. He loved to feel a spirited mount beneath him, his cruel sawing on the bit deliberately designed to achieve such a result. Sandisfield even took a savage pleasure from the act of inflicting pain, a form of perversion made famous by the notorious Marquis of Sade.

The same horse seldom remained long in Sandisfield's possession. A few months of his treatment was enough to ruin practically any animal, making it either a poor, spiritless brute of no value save for wagon pulling, or else a vicious outlaw, a killer, fit only to be put out of the way by a pistol bullet.

It might be said in passing that Sandisfield was shrewd enough to keep this side of his nature in the background when enjoying the society of Janice Lamberton, the girl he wished to marry. Nor did Janice ever see any manifestation of the frightful temper which at times completely dominated the man.

With her he was suave, affable, gracious; very much the cavalier. At his best Martin Sandisfield could be a thoroughly likable companion for a ride on the range or any other social diversion, displaying the qualities which had won the confidence and friendship of Joseph Lamberton. At his worst Martin was unspeakable.

On this wonderful summer morning San-

Sandisfield was thinking of Janice, gloating in the belief that his plans as regarded her were at last showing signs of early fulfillment. Several weeks had elapsed since his talk with Hugh Lamberton and the sinister understanding developed between them as a result of that conference.

Jan's cousin had been adroit in the way he went about his delicate task, drawing upon his fertile imagination for facts indicative of Sandisfield's worth, but all in all doing it so casually that Janice never suspected herself to be the victim of a selling campaign. Hugh's efforts were made the easier because of the high regard the girl's dead uncle had held for Martin Sandisfield, and also because Jan was on the whole not unfavorable to his ardent attentions.

"She's coming round," her worthy suitor reflected triumphantly. "No question about it. That dance ought to clinch the business. I've got to watch my step till the halter's pulled tight on her pretty neck. After that she'll be mine, and all hell can't take her away."

These highly agreeable musings were interrupted by a sudden and unexpected plunge of his mount, which nearly unseated Sandisfield, skilled horseman though he was. The animal had stepped close to the nest of a mourning dove, and the distracted mother bird fluttered up, wings beating frantically almost in its face. That was the final straw to equine endurance, tried to the breaking point by a morning of torment.

A trivial cause often brought to the surface the passion that slumbered like a dormant volcano in Sandisfield's brain.

"Try to buck me off, would you?" he snarled, using quirt, spurs, and bit as a punishment for the rashness that had dared challenge his supremacy.

The pony's response to this violence was instinctive and instantaneous: he arched his back like an angry cat, bucking and sun-fishing in a maddened effort to shake off the cause of all his troubles, which only brought further punishment. Under the stimulus of Sandisfield's savagery the goaded horse bucked the more earnestly, and the more he bucked the blacker grew his owner's rage.

By this time Sandisfield was quite beside

himself, and he began quirting at the horse's eyes, heedless of everything save a determination to conquer this brute or kill it. For the time all other considerations were forgotten in the flood of depraved pleasure he experienced in gratifying his lust for cruelty. Subconsciously he was reconciled to postponing the Boxed J L visit, realizing that his horse would be left in no condition to be seen by tender-hearted Janice Lamberton.

The pony shook its head and squealed with rage and pain, as Sandisfield deliberately cut at its eyes with the quirt, eager to blind it if possible. Sandisfield's own eagerness proved his ruin, for it left him quite unprepared for a sudden lithe twist of the muscular body between his legs; it was more than a sideward twist—a snap, rather, as of a powerfully compressed spring abruptly released.

With a gasp of astonishment and dismay Sandisfield found himself hurtling through the air, to land with a disconcerting thud on one shoulder, breath jolted from his body.

The pony snorted in triumph at finding itself freed from the ruthless domination of the man who had tortured it. Without an instant's hesitation it whirled toward Sandisfield's half-unconscious body, forefeet reared aloft in readiness to finish the good work already started.

Sandisfield looked stupidly up from the ground where he lay; he heard the triumphant squeal of the horse he had manhandled; he saw its flashing hoofs about to descend. He tried to reach the gun beneath him, but his muscles seemed paralyzed, incapable of responding.

At that instant Sandisfield was powerless, unable to lift even a finger to save himself from being pounded to a quivering mass of jelly. At heart little better than a craven, he died a thousand deaths in that awful instant while the horse reared above him like a sable Nemesis. He cowered closer to the ground, shrinking from the expected blows.

It is necessary to leave Martin Sandisfield involved in this serious predicament while the reader's attention is briefly di-

rected to a section of the range not far distant. We present to you another rider, of a type quite different from the one whose exploit has just been described. Meet Bob Kenworthy, a particular friend of ours! He is a good scout, is Bob, and we hope you'll like him.

In essential details Kenworthy's equipment resembled that worn by Sandisfield, with the exception that Bob's accouterments were all designed for strict utility instead of garish display. Also his legs were incased in chaps, or hair pants, an item omitted by Sandisfield, who made no pretense of qualifying as an honest-to-goodness cow-puncher.

Still more marked was the difference between the two men themselves. Bob was about twenty-five—that is to say, some ten years younger than Martin. He was slim and muscular in build, the skin of face and arms tanned to a healthy bronze by exposure to sun, wind, and weather on the vast expanse of the cattle ranges.

His honest gray eyes twinkled merrily, in quizzical good nature—eyes that one could see were made for laughing, but eyes that could on occasion be as hard and uncompromising as the cold sheen of winter sunlight on the blue steel of a pistol barrel.

Young Mr. Kenworthy jogged onward at an easy pace, chanting—for his own amusement—snatches of a familiar old trail ballad:

As I was out riding one morning for pleasure,
I met a young cowboy a-riding along,
His head was thrown back and his spurs was
a-jingling,
As he came toward me a-singing this song.

He rolled off the rollicking whoopee-ti-yi-yo chorus with gusto, vague thoughts in mind of times when he and fellow punchers had bedded down a herd to that and similar tunes; of times when restive steers had been kept quiet on a night so sultry that the very air seemed fraught with threats of a stampede—for range cattle are peculiarly susceptible to the sound of the human voice.

The rider interrupted his vocal efforts to manufacture deftly a cigarette out of the inevitable makings which formed a part of every cowboy's personal belongings. Be-

tween puffs he then ran through other verses, religiously following each one by a rendition of the swinging lilt of the chorus.

The music ceased abruptly as Bob rounded a low hogback and came within sight of another rider a short distance away—a rider who seemed to be having some little trouble with his mount.

"Ride 'er, Zeke! She's a-r'aring!" he chuckled, watching in keen interest the efforts made by this stranger to subdue what appeared to be a horse gone loco.

But presently Bob Kenworthy drew in his breath with a sudden, savage grunt, for that was about the time when Martin Sandisfield settled down to grim business with the quirt.

"I'm a son of a sea cook!" Bob growled, scowling. "What's the notion of treating a cayuse thataway? Guess we'll amble over and give the side show a look-see."

Acting on this impulse, Kenworthy turned his mount toward the point where Sandisfield, in the throes of uncontrolled passion, was doing his best to ruin a perfectly good horse. The intruder's scowl deepened as he drew near, for Bob Kenworthy loved horses, and had never been one to tolerate uncalled-for severity on the part of any rider. The present scene was not hard to understand, and Bob found welling up in his heart a savage rage that almost matched Sandisfield's, though it was a righteous rage and under full control.

Sandisfield remained wholly ignorant of the fact that he had acquired an audience, so intent was he on his evil task. Then came the unexpected dénouement which sent Mart sprawling helpless to the turf.

"Nice work, cayuse!" Bob applauded in hearty approval. "The skunk had it coming to him! Here's hoping it jolted his liver plumb out of shape." But already the puncher was unfastening his lariat from the saddlehorn, having in mind a shrewd surmise as to what might follow.

"What I sure ought to do is let the cayuse stamp that guy clean down to China," he grumbled. "It wouldn't be any more'n he deserves, but I'm afraid it wouldn't hardly do. Likely I'd better yank him out of the jam he's gone and got himself into."

Accordingly Bob Kenworthy acted, and just at the crucial instant when the sharp hoofs of Sandisfield's mount were descending like twin hammers on the helpless man coils of rope swished softly through the air, tightening about the neck of the maddened pony. Overbalanced, it fell backward.

Some of the color returned to Sandisfield's face at this unexpected reprieve. Weakly he stumbled to his feet, shuddering at the narrow margin by which he had escaped a dreadful death.

"That was quick work, cowboy," said he. "I'm obliged. If you'd been ten seconds later with your rope that damned horse would have made mincemeat out of me."

Kenworthy said no word in response, his face hard as granite, thin lips pressed close together. Sandisfield was blissfully unconscious of this hearty disapproval on the part of his rescuer. With an oath he drew his pistol. Then it was that Kenworthy spoke.

"Just what you aiming to do, stranger?" he inquired mildly.

The question seemed to recall to Sandisfield's mind something he overlooked.

"I want that horse you're riding," he snapped. "Name a price."

"You're traveling too fast. My cayuse ain't for sale."

"Of course he's for sale," Sandisfield insisted, with a confidence born of always having his own way. "I said name your price. Whatever you say will be all right."

"Guess you don't understand me, hombre," Bob stated coldly. "My horse ain't for sale at any price, *to you*. So, if you're counting on riding him home after shooting this poor brute I roped, take another think."

Sandisfield glanced from the horse, held captive by the lariat, to the face of the puncher who had saved his life. He was grateful for the service rendered, but found the stranger's tone and attitude not to his liking.

"Oh, well," he conceded, "the cayuse is yours, and if you're fool enough to pass up a handsome profit on him it's no concern of mine. Guess it won't kill me to walk a few miles." Sandisfield's attention again centered on his horse, and his face

grew black with the rage which still mastered him.

The pony had risen to its feet, neck encircled by Bob's rope, and now stood with heaving sides regarding its owner. The poor creature was in a pitiable condition, streaming blood and half blinded. A vicious oath escaped Sandisfield's lips as he leveled his pistol.

"No damned cayuse can buck me off and live!" he gritted through clenched teeth.

"Hold on there, hombre!" Bob observed, speaking with deceptive mildness. "Guess you better not shoot that cayuse. He ain't done a thing to deserve it."

Sandisfield's rage was in part transferred to Kenworthy at this interference.

"Is that so?" he snarled. "Who's going to stop me?"

"I might take a notion," Bob told him modestly.

By a Herculean effort Sandisfield kept sufficient control of his raging temper to speak with a semblance of coolness.

"I'm a bad man to cross," said he, "as you'd likely know if you weren't new in this section. You saved my life just now, for which I'll be glad to pay you, but that don't give you any license to butt in on my private business. Get it?"

"Not being afflicted with deafness, I'm able to hear all your remarks," Bob softly responded. "As regards pay for yanking the cayuse off you—I don't want any. I'm plumb ashamed of myself for doing it, as now I can see that the cayuse showed a sight better judgment in the matter than I did. I'm apologizing to him for interfering in *his* private business. The least I can do to square myself is to see that he gets an even break—and a bullet in the head ain't exactly my idea of that."

"You looking for trouble?" Sandisfield snapped.

"Looking for trouble!" Bob repeated with a mocking drawl. "Hombre, I sure am! They ain't anything I'm fonder of than trouble. Why, me and Old Man Trouble are bosom friends, as you might say."

"You've found it then," and with the words Sandisfield started to swing his drawn weapon around on this rash puncher. The

movement was never completed. Bob Kenworthy's right hand twitched, and like black magic there sprouted in it a blazing six-shooter. Dumfounded, Sandisfield felt his own gun flipped away as by a hammer blow; his fingers tingled sharply from the close impact of the bullet.

Contemptuously, Bob sheathed his .45, swinging briskly down from the saddle.

"Trouble with pole cats like you," he said cuttingly to the discomfited Sandisfield, "is that you can say things with your mouth which the same you ain't man enough to back up otherwise. What you most need is a guarddeen. Some day you're liable to get hurt."

Sandisfield had reached the parlous condition where he could only mumble unintelligibly. His insane rage caused objects to appear before him as if seen through a red mist that shimmered dizzily like heat waves across a barren waste of sun-scorched alkali. He longed to hurl himself upon this cowboy who had defied him, held back only by an instinct stronger even than his wrath—fear.

"I want to take a closer look at your cayuse," Bob Kenworthy said.

He approached the victim of Sandisfield's abuse, addressing it reassuringly, as one friend to another. At first the horse seemed distrustful—a thing not to be wondered at—pulling back on the lariat which held it. Kenworthy moved slowly, ever keeping up his softly-spoken words of comfort.

Only a few minutes before, the horse had been berserk, a demon bent on killing. But now a miracle of transformation had taken place. A soft nicker indicated surrender, and the velvet muzzle, from which drops of blood were falling, was extended to reach Bob's outstretched hand. Tears stood in the cowboy's eyes as he perceived the extent of wanton cruelty which had been vented on this horse.

"You poor devil!" he muttered brokenly.

Off from his neck came Bob Kenworthy's gayly colored handkerchief. This he moistened with whisky from a small flask he carried, and then Bob tenderly wiped away the gory evidence of Sandisfield's savagery. He thought that the horse would be permanently blinded in one eye, but time alone could settle that for certain.

Martin Sandisfield said nothing and did nothing while Bob went about his first aid to the maltreated pony; nor did Kenworthy pay him the least attention. When his task was concluded, Bob walked over to confront Sandisfield, his face set in hard, grim lines.

"Now," he said in a tone of complete satisfaction, "I'm ready to talk turkey to you. A man that can do what you did to that horse," Bob went on succinctly, "is so damned low that he's got to look up to see the bottom of a side-winder's belly. What I'm aiming for now is to give you a dose of your own medicine. If you think you can stop me—start in and welcome!"

Sandisfield was afraid of Bob Kenworthy, but those taunting words snapped the small margin of mastery that his fear held over his soul-consuming rage. Bellowing like a mad bull, he rushed his antagonist, arms swinging viciously. Bob's eyes narrowed, and he stepped to one side, sending a crashing hay-maker to the point of Sandisfield's jaw.

That blow rocked the man to his very foundations, giving the vertebræ of his neck an agonizing twist. The pain restored to him a degree of sanity, but Bob instantly followed up the advantage, boring in on Sandisfield and sending a perfect hail of savage blows at the fellow's eyes. Some of them Sandisfield managed to block, but not all.

With each thud of his fists Bob Kenworthy found peace and serenity returning to him.

"I'm letting you down easy, hombre," he said, as he deftly closed Sandisfield's left eye. "I ain't cutting you to pieces with a quirt like you deserve. I'm giving you a chance to hit back. Why don't you sock me?" Mockingly. "I'm right here a-waiting. Come on, you skunk. Make a fight out of it!"

Sandisfield ten years younger, might have been an even match for his relentless opponent. But the ten years of self-indulgence had robbed his muscles of their resiliency and sapped his wind. As a rough and ready scrapper, he gave a miserable exhibition. His wild swings were easily avoided, and the few blows he managed to send home

were mere lovetaps compared to the savage smashes Bob Kenworthy handed forth with lavish generosity.

Sandisfield was sobbing in the impotency of his rage, vainly striving to get at the mocking face which danced tantalizingly before him, imperfectly seen through his smarting, swollen eyes. Mart's breath came in gasps of agony, ever interrupted by the sickening crunch of hard fists on tortured flesh. Sandisfield was indeed paying a bitter price for his cruelty toward the horse. At last he could stand it no longer, dropping his arms in token of defeat.

"Had enough, have you?" Kenworthy asked, interestedly.

"Yes, damn you!" The words were spoken thickly, for Mr. Sandisfield was having serious trouble with his articulation.

Bob Kenworthy surveyed the results he had accomplished—with the air of a true connoisseur.

"Yes," he agreed, "I'd say you've had a plenty." Then in an impulse of compassion for the wreck before him he produced his flask. "Take a pull at Old Jawn Barleycorn, hombre. Looks to me like you're in bad need of his help."

Sandisfield accepted the offer eagerly, albeit with poor grace, draining the bottle to its last drop.

"Didn't save me much, did you?" Bob grunted with a shrug of his shoulders. Speculatively he eyed Sandisfield. "I'm buying that cayuse off you," he next observed. "He ain't worth much from the looks of things right now. So all I'm paying is twenty dollars. Write me out a bill of sale."

Sandisfield's damaged lips curled back in a sneer.

"Twenty dollars for that horse!" he protested spitefully. "You're loco. He cost me two hundred, and was cheap at that."

"Well, I'm paying exactly twenty more'n he'd be worth right now if you'd had your way with him. Hides are dirt cheap, and a dead cayuse ain't hardly worth the bother of skinning. But I ain't disposed to argue," and Bob's voice grew threatening. "Might be I ain't gentled you enough yet. Dig up some paper and write me that there bill of sale, or I'll sure have to labor with you some more. That what you want?"

There was an unmistakable something about Kenworthy's cold gray eyes that served as a warning to Martin Sandisfield, whose battered body cringed at the mere thought of facing again such punishment as he had already received.

"You're sitting high and pretty now, cowboy," he muttered. "But other days are coming, and this country ain't big enough to hold the two of us."

"Just what I was thinking," Bob agreed cordially. "So you best make plans to shift on some place else. Meanwhile, as I a'ready remarked, I'm buying your cayuse. Make that bill of sale out to Robert Kenworthy."

Muttering and grumbling to himself, Martin scrawled a few lines on a scrap of paper, in exchange for which Bob gravely tendered a double eagle.

"Oh, so you're Sandisfield, eh?" he said indifferently, glancing at the informal document. "The big gun on this neck of the range, so I've heard." He paused to send a withering glance at Martin. "Right now you don't look much bigger'n a kid's toy cap pistol."

"Well, adios, hombre. I'm a riding. You can get back your saddle and bridle in Bald Butte. Next time you try out any rough stuff on a cayuse, make sure I ain't in the neighborhood."

That evening Bob Kenworthy wandered forth on the streets of Bald Butte, a stranger in town. Spurs jingled on his boot heels and coins jingled in his pocket. He was wondering if there was any hope of locating a poker game run on the level.

"Chances are they're all as crooked as a dog's hind leg," he grumbled. "I'm craving excitement, but I sure ain't in the mood to contribute to local charity by way of crimped cards."

When he blew into town Bob Kenworthy had located a livery stable in charge of one Slim Pawling, a former trail boss of his when the two of them had been employed by the Wagonwheel outfit up in eastern Montana. After suitable greetings had been exchanged Bob briefly related the trend of events which led to his ownership of Sandisfield's horse. Mr. Pawling nodded.

"You done prezactly right, son, though they ain't a lot of folks hereabouts that would have had the nerve to stack up against Mart Sandisfield. Most generally he has his own way quite complete."

Kenworthy snorted his disgust.

"Mean to say that there shorthorn's got the Indian sign on the whole section? He ain't any more'n a half portion misfit."

"Mart ain't such a much himself, mebbe, but he's got a choice squad of gun-slingers that are proud to do his dirty work for him, being well paid for their labor. Keep your pants on while sojourning in our happy midst."

"Thanks, I will," Bob retorted dryly, whereat his old friend chuckled.

"Guess you can take care of yourself in a jam. It's hard, kind of, to figure out what might bust loose account of your play. One thing's a cinch—that Sandisfield won't advertise it, being's he had to take the short end. Suppose we sit tight and let her ride for awhile. I'll send word to Mart that his saddle and bridle are here, and I'll see that the hoss gets good care. Otherwise I'll keep my trap closed. Savvy?"

"Keno!" was Bob Kenworthy's indifferent response.

"How long you planning to be in town?" Pawling inquired.

"I wasn't aimin' to stick a-tall, but now wild bulls couldn't drag me off. This Sandisfield party's got me intrigued, as one might say. Things have been sort of tiresome by me lately."

Slim Pawling chuckled again, but there was a grimness latent under his chuckle.

"They's one thing I can guarantee. Knowing Mart Sandisfield fair to middling intimately like I do, you ain't liable to be bothered unduly thataway in the future. Aside from which, big doings are slated for this burg 'fore long. Be a blunder, sort of, to miss the fireworks."

"I don't figure on missing a thing," Bob said. "Where's a handy place to stop?"

"Go to the Santa Fe. There's a nice clean hostelry and it's run by a white man, Johnny Evarts. Tell him you're a friend of mine, and he'll treat you slick. You better leave the bulk of your spare cash in his safe."

"I'll do that," and Bob turned to leave. "Much obliged, Slim. Adios."

"Something tells me I'm going to like this town," Bob mused, as he directed his steps toward the Santa Fe. Following Pawling's suggestion, he engaged a room, after which came a highly satisfactory supper. And so, in due season, we find Mr. Kenworthy wandering about the streets in search of amusement.

Bob's attention was presently attracted by the sound of music from a brightly lighted resort across the street. Thoughtfully, he regarded it.

"The Palace, huh!" he muttered, reading the name which arched in huge letters over the doorway. "Guess I'll look her over. I'll try anything once—and sometimes twice."

He entered inconspicuously, glancing about him in idle curiosity. The place was a typical establishment of the frontier period, a mahogany bar extending along one side, three or four white-aproned drinkshooters industriously taking care of business, which seemed to be flourishing.

At the center of the large room was a space reserved for dancing, and surrounding this were scattered tables where patrons could partake of liquid refreshment or play cards as suited their fancy. At the back of the room were sundry games of chance run by the house—faro, Monte, roulette, and so on—together with a pool table, where two range riders were trying out their skill with the cues.

Bob noted all these familiar details at a single glance. He then stepped to the bar to quench a natural thirst, approaching an end where trade for the moment chanced to have slackened. In answer to the attendant's "What 'll it be?" Bob named a popular brand of tanglefoot, and at that instant felt a light tap on his shoulder, accompanied by the sotto voce command:

"I'll take your gun, cowboy!"

Quick and lithe on his feet as a cat, Bob Kenworthy spun around, to find himself confronting a stern-visaged man of middle age.

"What the hell will you take my gun for?" he demanded belligerently.

"Don't try to start anything, son," the

other said in not unkindly tones. "Just fork over your shooting-iron peaceable like. You'll get it back when you leave."

"What sort of game is this you're running?" Bob grunted, half angry, half puzzled.

"He doesn't understand, Jim," came in a soft, musical voice, and in response to this interruption, Bob whirled to the left, staring in amazement at the speaker—a young woman and one of rare beauty.

This was a period when the so-called Princess gowns were in vogue, truly stunning when worn by a woman fortunate enough to possess the physical qualifications demanded by the style. It was at such a creation—and such a woman, too—that Bob now goggled, like a fish out of water.

The gown, of black velvet, was cut daringly low on her bosom, its bodice tapering beneath to a waist astonishingly small, yet without the string-tied-around-a-pillow effect that was too often the price paid for artificial slenderness by fair ones at the time.

Perhaps we are guilty of a serious *faux pas* in giving the gown precedence over the wearer. We have intimated that she was beautiful. What more need be added? Save, perhaps, that she seemed as much out of place in those surroundings as did the gown which graced her rich beauty.

She dazzled like a splendid diamond in a miserable setting. But among all precious stones the diamond is the hardest, and one could sense, even in the soft, melting glance of this dance hall queen, a hardness, and, thinly veiled beneath her silken lashes, more than a hint of tragedy.

Bob Kenworthy did not stare to the point of rudeness. Instantly he swept off his Stetson with a flourish, bowing in courtly grace.

"What you just said is true, ma'am," said he. "This gent asks for my gun, but he's powerful chary about backing up the demand with reasons. I sure don't understand the game a-tall."

She smiled approvingly on young Mr. Kenworthy, the smile enhancing her own beauty.

"It's house rules," was the explanation vouchsafed. "We prefer to have customers check their guns. Shooting scrapes

are messy—and bad for business," she added demurely.

"I see," Bob temporized, though he didn't—quite. "But who are you, ma'am, if you'll excuse me for inquiring?"

"Why," she rejoined, with an almost imperceptible trace of hesitation, "I happen to be the owner of this dance hall."

"Oh!" Kenworthy ejaculated. Things were clearing up. The man who had accosted him was without doubt a professional bouncer—a gun slinger of proved ability hired to enforce the house ruling on weapons, and other matters. The requirement was unusual—yet it was also unusual to find a woman of this type running such an establishment.

But Bob's sharp eyes detected one or two points that seemed to call for further explanation.

"That rule of yours don't work the same on everybody, looks like," he quietly suggested, nodding toward one or two men not far distant, men whose leather gun sheaths sagged under the weight of conspicuous .45s. They got a drag—or something?" Bob concluded. His tone was now challenging, perhaps even faintly hostile, though still courteous.

At this point the bouncer entered the conversation.

"Look a-here, Miss Lucy," he suggested. "You don't need to bother squaring yourself or your house with this range rider. What say I give him a rush? He's a-asking for it, strikes me."

Miss Lucy's face flushed; imperiously she stamped a slippered foot.

"That's quite uncalled-for, Jim," she told her retainer. "You may go. I'll deal with this gentleman."

The bouncer accepted her rebuke with surprising humility and no trace of resentment.

"I'm begging your pardon, ma'am," he mumbled, and started to withdraw. "I was meaning for the best, though."

His fair employer instantly relented, flashing on him a winsome smile that showed a row of even white teeth.

"I know that, Jim. Forgive me for being nasty." With a friendly, confiding little gesture she rested her hand on the arm of

Jim as he stepped aside, and this graciousness wholly restored his aplomb. Miss Lucy's smile was now directed at young Mr. Kenworthy.

"Jim's true blue," she observed, "but at times he slips—when affairs have to be handled delicately. Jim is not an expert judge of character. Your natural resentment was entirely justifiable."

Bob's natural resentment instantly vanished.

"I don't know as I'd blame Jim at that, ma'am," he said frankly. "Mebbe I was a mite aggravating."

"No," she disclaimed, "you were right. I should have explained that the rule against wearing guns in here applies only to strangers or local men who have proved unreliable in the past. We lose some business, perhaps, but in the long run it pays. You will not be troubled again."

"That's very kind of you, ma'am," Bob gravely rejoined. "I sure appreciate your confidence, which I'll endeavor to deserve."

"I'm certain you will," she replied, and turned away, for their discussion was beginning to attract interested attention.

Bob slowly sipped his whisky, one elbow leaning on the bar, and watched the slim, graceful figure passing here and there among the tables.

"I'd say this was a queer sort of proposition," he mused. "A woman as nice as that one is—and running a saloon and dance hall. The parts don't fit."

In the course of these reflections he was aware of a low-voiced conversation between two men who were buying drinks close beside him; instantly Bob became all ears.

"See Mart this evening?" one asked.

"No. What about him?"

"I don't know exactly; but they's stray rumors circulating about Charlie Rand's place. Seems like Mart got busted off his hoss into a pile of rocks or something, and Doc Peaseley's been working on him a heap. His face was more or less bashed in."

"Yeah? That's tough luck for Mart."

"You said it. But they's one thing I can't understand. How'd a fellow get him a pair of black eyes, not to mention a lot of other punishment, out of being bucked off a cayuse? Know what I think? I think

some guy got into an argument with Mart out on the range and just naturally beat him up most scandalous."

"So?" was the indifferent response. "Well, mebbe you're right, and mebbe you ain't. If you are, the hombre that's responsible won't stick around—provided he's a gent of discretion. This section ain't liable to be healthy for any one Mart's taken a cordial dislike to. He better get scarce while the traveling's good."

Bob Kenworthy chuckled noiselessly to himself.

"Mart Sandisfield's got a terrible reputation to live up to," he thought. "I wonder if he's as hard-boiled as folks give him credit for. Offhand and judged from what I've seen of the lad a'ready, I'd say he ain't—but likely I'll find out for sure before I'm through. One thing sure—the more I see of this burg, the better I like it. What I want right now is action, and according to the signs Bald Butte's a good place to locate it."

CHAPTER III.

AT THE BOXED J L.

JANICE LAMBERTON was out of sorts with herself and the entire world that morning—the third one following Martin Sandisfield's disastrous session with Bob Kenworthy on the range. A number of things had gone wrong with Miss Janice. She had been working on a new gown to be worn at the dance destined to wind up Bald Butte's jubilee, and in not a single point did it meet her desires. The effect, when she studied herself in a none-too-large mirror, was disappointing, far from doing justice to the skill Jan ordinarily displayed.

"It's simply hideous!" she ejaculated impatiently. "An Indian squaw could do better!" and in a sudden fit of anger she ripped the material apart, determined to begin all over again.

This alone could readily account for most of the mental unrest which afflicted the girl, but other things also obtruded—thoughts of Martin Sandisfield, for instance, regarding whom Janice frankly found herself in a quandary.

She confessed a liking for Mart, her feelings inevitably swayed by the high place he had held in Joseph Lamberton's affections, and also to some extent by her cousin Hugh's close friendship with the man. In Sandisfield she could discern nothing worthy of severe criticism, and on the other hand many qualities capable of inspiring genuine admiration. Yet some subtle inhibition seemed to warn against yielding too far to his ardent pleas.

Poor Janice was in the unfortunate position of having no one to depend on save herself alone. Hugh Lamberton, on whom the burden of guardianship nominally rested, should have been the man to tell her of Sandisfield's unworthiness. But Hugh, as the reader has already seen, was at best an attractive scamp, horribly enmeshed in the web of evil woven by his own weakness and lack of moral fiber.

Not a few men throughout the region liked Janice Lamberton, for she was the sort of girl who attracts the opposite sex as surely and inevitably as a clover field attracts bees. Many of these men knew Martin Sandisfield's failings—to use a moderate word—only too well; well enough, indeed, to have shot him quite cheerfully had he ventured to include a sister of theirs in his attentions.

But it is an almost universal code among men not to bear tales of a fellow man to a woman, and especially does it violate the code when the talebearer himself might have personal interest in the woman. Some men, it is true—older men, that is—might conceivably have told Janice Lamberton a few pointed facts had it not been for the presence of Hugh, who was naturally her protector. And if Hugh was content to see his pretty cousin marry a skunk in human form, what right did outsiders have to interfere? Family matters are usually sacred.

There was still another consideration not without some definite bearing on the affair—the widespread influence and power which Martin Sandisfield exerted both in Bald Butte and the surrounding range country. Running opposition to his plans was known to be an unhealthy and extremely hazardous pastime.

Sandisfield had early spread abroad the

impression that the Boxed J L was to be considered his private range in the matter of social activities, and since he was obviously made welcome there, as one on the ground floor, he came to enjoy what amounted to a virtual monopoly.

Thus one should not be overcritical of Janice for allowing her relations with Martin Sandisfield to drift perilously near an intimate state. She was a victim of circumstances beyond her control.

On this particular morning Janice was a little put out with Sandisfield through a belief that he had neglected her—and even to the extreme of failing a definitely made engagement to go riding. She was inclined to take this as a deliberate affront—as an indication that Sandisfield was altogether too sure of her.

It seemed all the more uncalled-for, because, though Sandisfield seemed to take it for granted that Janice would attend the dance in his company, she had up to this time teasingly refused to commit herself. What made it all the more aggravating was Jan's inner knowledge that she would not miss that dance for worlds and that it was a case of go with him or no one.

Josefa, the Mexican housemaid, had already served Hugh his breakfast when Janice entered the dining room. Hugh had been at Bald Butte the evening before, returning late to the ranch.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed, glancing at his cousin's face. "Why the dark clouds? Isn't the party dress proving a knock-out?"

"That's just the trouble. It's about knocked me out." And Janice managed to smile ruefully. Last night I worked at the beastly thing till my eyes smarted. This morning I tried it on, and I give you my word, Hugh, I looked like a disconsolate old maid." Her tone was tragic. "I was so mad I wanted to cry."

Hugh poured himself a second cup of coffee, spooning in a generous portion of sugar.

"You're crowding things, strikes me," he remarked shrewdly. "Plenty of time yet to rig up your war feathers. Get a few extra doo-dads in town and glue 'em on here and there. Take in a tuck or whatever you call it in one place; let it out in

another. Add a few yards of silk to the trail in the dust. First thing you know the job's done. Cinch! Have some coffee, and the sun 'll be shining again."

"Thanks, I will. I'm terribly ashamed to get up with such a grouch, and all over so trivial a matter as a new frock."

"Sore at Mart, too, ain't you?" and Hugh deftly speared two fried eggs. "Because he let you down day before yesterday."

"I'm not sore at anybody," Janice replied with great dignity.

"Sa-ay!" Hugh jeered good naturedly. "I'm not blind. But you ought to give a chap the chance to explain before sinking your heels in his ribs. Mart couldn't come."

"Why not?" Janice demanded, a trace of color showing on her cheeks.

"Poor devil was thrown off his cayuse on the way out here. Mighty near killed him too. His face is a sight."

All of Jan's resentment was swept away in a feeling of concern for Martin Sandisfield, together with a sense of guilt that she had been so unjust.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" she gasped. "Is he really injured seriously?"

"Thanks to Doc Peaseley he'll be O K in a few days, but Mart was worried a lot over what you'd think when he didn't show up for the ride. Asked me how you took it. Also he said tell you it would need more'n being bucked off a broncho to keep him from taking you to the dance."

"I haven't promised to go with him—not yet," Janice murmured pensively.

"But all the time you're working on a new dress to wear!" Hugh chuckled. "Women are sure hard to beat. What's the big idea of keeping a man dangling?"

"I don't know," Janice confessed, with a hopeless shrug of her shoulders. "Just the devil cropping up in me, I suppose. Sometimes—it's awfully hard to explain, Hugh, but I feel as if I didn't know Mart at all. He seems like a stranger to me, and I imag-

ine he's holding himself on guard, trying to keep me from seeing what sort of man he is inside."

"Why, Jan," Hugh cried. "What sort of foolishness are you raving now?"

"It is foolishness, isn't it, Hugh?"

"Of course it's foolishness! And you want to snap yourself out pronto."

"It's something to do with Martin's eyes, I think," Janice mused aloud. "They're so expressionless that they frighten me at times, and I can't help wondering what's wrong with a man who has eyes like that. You know Martin better than I do, Hugh. Are you sure he's all right?"

"Mart Sandisfield lacks a lot of being perfect, mebbe," Hugh replied slowly. "No man's perfect, for that matter."

"That's not what I mean, Hugh," Janice interrupted quickly. "I know he's not perfect—any more than I am. I'm not so unreasonable as to expect perfection, or even want it, in my friends. But if Martin wasn't all right—you know what I mean by that, Hugh—you'd tell me, wouldn't you? You see it's awfully important for me. I've just got to know, and there's no one else I can ask."

Hugh Lamberton shoved back from the table, his appetite for food suddenly gone. An impulse momentarily swept over him—an impulse to be decent for once at least toward this girl whom he had been defrauding for years. Hugh even opened his mouth to speak, to warn her against Sandisfield as if he were the personification of evil.

But the words remained unsaid. Hugh visioned himself ruined, disgraced, probably condemned to prison—and he lacked the manhood to save Janice when saving her meant his own destruction.

"*Mart Sandisfield is all right, Jan,*" he told her steadily.

Then Hugh Lamberton rose from his chair and abruptly left the room, his spurs jingling. He could not bear to stay there and face the look in his cousin's clear, honest eyes.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The amazing experiences of George Washington, brought back to life in this modern age, are told in "The Return of George Washington," by George F. Worts. The story starts in *Argosy-Allstory*, October 15th.



The Bully of Biscayne Bay

By LORING BRENT

Author of "Bringing the Boom to Vingo," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

TEDDY ARMBISTER did not dislike young women for the customary reasons. Most young men who freely and frankly avow that the ladies leave them cold are not woman haters at all; the trouble with them is, that they are endowed too generously with the quality which causes a violet to shrink.

The young man who really hates girls with all his heart and soul is the unfortunate who does not attract them. He may be lacking in personal magnetism, which is another name for that engaging and commendable trait known as "It"; or he may be too short, too bald, or too fat.

In any event, there is about him something that fails to awaken a warm response in feminine hearts, and in him you find pride being assuaged and vanity salved by a hearty hatred of—to use his own bitter, cynical words—the unfair sex.

Yet none of these reasons accounted for Teddy Armbrister's aversion to young women. He was not a quaking coward in their presence; in fact, he was always gracefully at his ease, and he was neither short, bald,

nor fat, but tall, slim and singularly good looking, with a fine mop of thick, curly hair.

Teddy Armbrister hated women because he liked them too much; hated them because he was putty in their lovely hands; because he was reasonably sure that, one of these fine days, some charming girl was going to trap him in her web, and he would, for the rest of his life, eat his breakfast across from the same sweet face and, night after night, kiss the same mouth on his return from the office.

One of these days, to be sure, he would marry and settle down, but when that time came he wanted to be the one to decide who his breakfast partner was going to be.

He often wondered if most men were as waxlike in the hands of the girl they happened to be with as was he, and he had the greatest admiration and respect, not unmingled with honest envy, for those rare bluff fellows who treated them rough and told them nothing; who loved 'em and left 'em.

Teddy Armbrister, at the moment when our story opens, was devoting considerably



more thought to the girl to whom he was dictating a letter than to the letter which she was nimbly putting into pothooks and other mysterious symbols upon the page of her notebook. Her name was Beulah March.

Miss March was efficient and intelligent. Doubtless, she was, as private secretaries went, a paragon; yet Teddy Armbrister was uneasy from the hour she entered his office.

It was hard to concentrate on work when she was around; much pleasanter to gaze into her great, blue trustful eyes. These eyes of Miss March's were as blue as summer skies—and as full of romantic adventurous promise. Miss March had the sweetest, most tempting smile; and her cutely-bobbed hair had in it the seldom seen sparkle of newly minted gold.

Teddy Armbrister knew that some product sold over a drug store counter had assisted in this newly-minted-gold look. But the result was enchanting.

With alluring, lovely youth so close at hand, it was hard to say, in brisk, business-like tones:

"Gentlemen: In reply to your inquiry of the thirtieth, ult—"

Far more natural, far more human to wonder dreamily if that small pink mouth would taste as sweet as it looked.

The telephone rang. Miss March started to rise, but Teddy Armbrister said: "I'll take it"; and in very businesslike accents he snapped into the transmitter: "Armbrister talking!"

"Is that you, Teddy?" a sweet, drawling, feminine voice answered him. "I do wish you wouldn't bark at me that way. This is Sylvia."

"I'm sorry I barked, Sylvia," the young man apologized, his voice at once falling into the gentle cadences he employed with them all. "I didn't mean to bark. I'm so sorry it sounded like a bark."

There followed a few pleasantries regard-

ing health and the weather. Then Sylvia said:

"Teddy, wouldn't you like to take me out to dinner to-night—somewhere where we can dance? I'm so lonely."

"I'd love to!" Teddy exclaimed with enthusiasm which rang so true that the most expert ear would have been deceived.

He didn't want to take Sylvia out to dine and dance to-night. He had wanted to go to the amateur fights at his athletic club; but he hadn't the heart to turn Sylvia down.

"What time will you call?"

"About seven?" Teddy suggested.

"I'll be ready, Teddy. You're such a dear! Good-by!"

"Good-by," said Teddy, listlessly, and turned back to Miss March.

The promise of summery romance and adventure was no longer shining forth from her big, blue eyes, and her pink lips were no longer curled in their tempting smile. Summer skies were threatened by a squall. Her eyes were murky now and half-lidded, and her sweet mouth was pouting.

Nor was the atmosphere cleared when, about an hour later, Clara Jennings telephoned and asked him if he would take her to lunch. Obediently he said that he would be delighted. And when he next glanced in Miss March's direction, she was giving him a look that could be described only as venomous.

That gave Teddy Armbister something to think about. His private secretary was jealous of these girls who were calling him up all the time, just as these girls were—or pretended to be—jealous of one another.

In short, the predicament in which we find Teddy was anything but painless. Many men would have given their fortunes to enjoy only a little of his popularity—charming, beautiful girls calling him up all day long, begging for a little of his time!

But Teddy Armbister hated it. He was in love with none of them, but he could not bring himself to hurt their feelings. He had been brought up rigorously to believe that women were tender creatures, with fragile bodies and delicate sensibilities; meant to be protected physically and spiritually by big, strong men such as he, and he had learned his lesson well.

Many a spoiled, petulant girl he would have loved to take firmly by the hair and drag her this way and that; but he was never anything but courteous, gentle and considerate, no matter how unreasonable, how inconsiderate they were. And naturally they took outrageous advantage of him. Such men as Teddy Armbister are grist to the mill of all women.

It was along about eleven o'clock when Teddy became conscious that the brisk clatter of the typewriter in the small room adjoining his had ceased. He became further conscious that the tiny uproar of its industry had been stilled for quite some time.

He wondered uneasily what was wrong. He had given Miss March several important letters, and she should have brought them in to be signed long since.

As he waited, he heard that which sounded suspiciously and sickeningly like a muffled sob.

He waited still longer; and again from the small adjoining room was wafted the sound of a muffled sob.

Teddy Armbister drew in a long breath and his lids dropped down halfway. Of private secretaries he was becoming more and more suspicious.

The last one, Miss Jameson, coming back from lunch one day, had impulsively thrown her arms about his neck when he helped her off with her coat. The one before that—a Miss Eldridge—had impishly sat down on his knee one morning when she came in to take dictation.

To be sure, it was done in a spirit of innocent play; but Teddy Armbister believed in keeping business and play, however innocent, distinct and separate, and he had, as tactfully as possible, got rid of them both.

He could not know, of course, how appealing was his courtly, rather old fashioned attitude toward women which his Aunt Priscilla had instilled in him, or how alluring, to feminine eyes, was his John Barrymore profile, his Tommy Meighan smile and his Buster Keaton gravity.

He did know, however, that if he was reading the signs aright, one more private secretary was soon going the way of her predecessors.

The sobs were coming with greater frequency now, and there was but one course that a gentleman could pursue: he must do something about it.

Teddy Armbrister arose with a certain grimness from his desk and strode into the small adjoining room, where he found his beautiful new secretary, golden head pillowed on arms, slender little shoulders quivering with sobs. He gazed upon that pathetic spectacle with severity.

"Miss March," he said.

The sobbing did not cease. Not by the slightest sign did she acknowledge his presence.

"Miss March," he repeated, a little sharply.

"What—fnff—fnff—is—fnff—fnff—it?"

Teddy Armbrister cleared his throat.

"I wouldn't cry like that."

"Whuh-whuh-whuh-why?"

"It will ruin your complexion."

The girl continued to sob.

"Yuh-yuh-who cuh-cuh-cares?"

"If I had a complexion as beautiful as that," answered her employer in the manner of one dealing with a child, "*I'd* care."

Miss March promptly sat up, wheeled about in her chair and fixed him with very wet, reproachful blue eyes.

"How do you know I've got a beautiful complexion?" she wailed. "You've never even seen it!"

Teddy Armbrister was blushing. He was at least five times as attractive when he was blushing as when he wasn't blushing.

"Of course I've seen it!"

"Well, you don't care whether it's ruined or not!" the lovely girl accused him.

"Of course I care," he declared doggedly.

"Well, you don't seem to care. If I'd thought you cared, I wouldn't have cried. Why didn't you say you cared? You've acted like an ice man. I mean, a man made of ice. I mean, to me. And you're making dates all day long with every girl who calls you up and wants to wrangle a free lunch. Can—can I borrow your hanky, Teddy?"

Teddy whisked out his handkerchief, a corner of which was protruding from his outer coat pocket like a rabbit's ear. The nymph dried her tears with it.

She had drawn him irresistibly into her web by placing a double meaning upon the simplest words, and she was now no doubt going to toy with him, as a spider toys with a freshly caught fly.

"Teddy—" she began, clutching his handkerchief firmly in her left hand. "It—it's all right to call you Teddy, isn't it? I mean—now? You know what I mean."

"Yes," said Teddy, "I know what you mean."

"Teddy—"

The door of the outer room slammed. Miss March compressed her rosebud lips in vexation and Jimmy, the office boy, came swaggering in.

He glanced cynically at the moist-eyed golden blonde and addressed Teddy Armbrister.

"Here's a registered letter for you, Mr. Armbrister," he said. "And Mr. Juveen wants t' see you right away."

"I'll be right in," Teddy gasped. And he followed Jimmy out of the office so closely that he almost stepped on the office boy's heels.

Teddy examined the registered letter as he went down the corridor toward Mr. Juveen's office. It was addressed in his Aunt Priscilla's familiar handwriting. He opened the letter and found himself staring in astonishment at a check—a check for twenty thousand dollars!

Why was Aunt Priscilla sending him a check for twenty thousand dollars? It was months away from Christmas and months away from his birthday. Always, on Christmas and his birthday, she sent him a check for five hundred dollars. He read the letter eagerly.

MY DEAREST NEPHEW:

I am sure that you will find some use for the inclosed. My wants are so simple that I find it more and more difficult to spend my income. I am sending you this out of the principal. The interest on the balance of my principal will more than keep me in comfort out here in California, where everything is so cheap. I know that you will spend this money worthily.

With love,

AUNT PRISCILLA.

Teddy Armbrister tucked the check away in a vest pocket and proceeded on

down the hall. Twenty thousand dollars! Enough to pay off all his outstanding debts, enable him to buy that smart new roadster he had been admiring, with enough left over to start—at last—a savings account. Dear old Aunt Priscilla!

He did not look upon that letter, that check, as the first move on the part of a dark, mysterious destiny that was intent upon reshaping his whole life. Teddy Arm-bister was not a believer in such things, anyway.

He was one who laughed at fate. Later, he would look back upon to-day with an almost reverent awe. But at the moment his only emotion was one of tingling delight at Aunt Priscilla's generosity, and of relief at so neatly escaping the web that Miss March had spun for him.

With a clear conscience and a happy smile he pushed open the door of Mr. Juveen's office.

II.

DAVID JUVEEN, the president and chairman of the directorial board of the Pan American Export and Import Corporation, was a stout little, brown little man. He was, indeed, a rhapsody in brown. He was brown of hair, of skin, of eyes. His mustache was brown. His suit, his oxfords, his socks and his necktie were brown.

By way of contrast, perhaps, he was smoking a blond cigar. Twinkling is a function of the stars, yet Mr. Juveen's eyes were twinkling, or seemed to be twinkling, when Teddy Arm-bister gently closed the door behind him and approached the desk.

It was the first time he had ever entered Mr. Juveen's office without a certain, inner, indefinable tremor. Not without reason was Mr. Juveen known as a king-maker, a man-breaker, a despot. In all Pan American affairs his influence was persistently felt.

"Sit down, Ted," the great little man said pleasantly.

Teddy Arm-bister seated himself in the desk-side chair, but this morning he experienced no inner qualms. Mr. Juveen was worth twenty millions; Teddy was worth, at this moment, twenty thousand, and it

is doubtful if Mr. Juveen felt half as rich.

"Have a cigar," said the president of P.A.E. and I., affably.

"No, thanks," said Teddy, "I'll smoke a cigarette." And wondered what was in the wind.

Mr. Juveen ordinarily handed out cigars only to those men who were about to be relieved of their positions.

"I've been looking you up, Ted," the little brown man confided. "I find you've been with us five years. I find that you started without pull pretty close to the bottom and have worked your way up toward the top in a surprisingly short time—for a young fellow as good looking as you are. I generally haven't much faith in men who are too good looking, but you are obviously an exception. You're drawing down ten thousand a year now, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," answered Teddy Arm-bister. "Ten thousand."

"And you're only twenty-seven."

Teddy nodded.

"I think you've done exceedingly well, Ted; exceedingly well! In fact, I'm proud of you. Aren't thinking of getting married right away, are you?"

"No, Mr. Juveen; I'm not."

"No entangling alliances, eh?"

"No; no alliances." Teddy smiled.

"Keep away from entangling alliances, Ted. And keep right on viewing marriage as if it were something accursed. That is, if you want to keep on making a hit with me. I never married and I'm never going to marry. A young man married is a young man marred. He travels fastest who travels alone. Pin those slogans in your hat, Teddy. Women are parasites. They eat your time, they eat your money, they eat your ambition. Personally, I hate women."

"So do I," said Teddy, feelingly.

"I hoped so. Keep on hating them. Don't let any of them get anything on you. I did once. It cost me a hundred thousand dollars—damn her! But women are useful, Teddy. They are useful as long as you can keep them guessing.

"Never commit yourself with a woman. Play her the way you play a fish—but let

her get off the hook before it's too late. Always remember there are all sorts of fish in the sea."

"It's a sound idea," Teddy agreed.

"I'm glad we feel the same way about it," Mr. Juveen went on. "Because that point of view is absolutely necessary for the new job I've got for you. Banton is going out, Teddy, and you are going in!"

The exclamation point was Mr. Juveen's. He made the statement as if it were exciting, important news. And it was.

Mr.—Bill—Banton was Teddy Armbister's immediate superior; was head of the P.A.E. and I. export department, and Teddy was by way of being his assistant, although he was actually handling half the work of the department, if not more. His title was Assistant Export Manager.

Having made his announcement, Mr. Juveen settled back in his chair, clasped his pudgy little hands behind his head and looked at Teddy Armbister with the same expression employed by the celebrated cat that swallowed a canary.

"But, Great Scot—" Teddy began.

"No ifs, buts or ands about it," Mr. Juveen jovially stopped him. "I expected you'd be surprised. I expected it would take your breath away. It's a big job, Ted. It's right next door to mine. I'm going to start you off at fifteen thousand a year. That means you can live on a scale much wider than the one you're living on now. You'll have a practically unlimited drawing account, too, of course."

Teddy Armbister was not receiving the news with perceptible enthusiasm. Three vertical grooves had come into being between his fine blue eyes, and his brows were roughed up. They were thick, heavy brows and when Teddy roughed them up in this fashion they resembled the backs of two angry kittens.

"But what's going to become of Bill?" he wanted to know.

"I'm giving Bill the Nicaragua office," Mr. Juveen told him. "Things need snapping up down there, and Bill's just the man for it."

Teddy Armbister continued to frown. Mr. Juveen, was in so many words, giving Bill Banton the gate.

When Mr. Juveen wanted to get rid of a piece of old timber, he relegated him to one of the unimportant Central American offices. It was equivalent to being pensioned—but worse.

In those stagnant little countries, the victim soon drank himself beyond Mr. Juveen's further fatherly consideration.

Teddy Armbister slowly shook his head and "I don't like it," he said.

Mr. Juveen withdrew his hands from the back of his head and sat up straight with a stare.

"Why don't you like it?" he snapped.

"In the first place," Teddy answered, "that job has killed off every man, so far as I know, who ever held it. Cartwright, when last heard from, was beachcombing down around Papeete or Tutuila. Anderson is lying in a drunkard's grave in Panama. Murray, out in Hong Kong, has become one of China's leading opium smokers. There's too much drinking connected with that job, Mr. Juveen. Bill Banton has drunk himself into a state of stupidity. He's drink goofy! You're sending him down to Nicaragua to get him out of the way."

Mr. Juveen's eyes had lost their starry twinkle and had acquired the surface hardness, say, of agate, but his manner was still affable when he spoke.

"The trouble with each and every one of those men, Teddy, was that they lacked the strength of character that that job calls for. I've been trying for years to find the right man for that job and—I think I've found him in you."

"That job," Teddy persisted, stubbornly, "is a drinking job. These South American customers come up here and they want a wild time. It's the export manager's job to see they find it—wine, women and night clubs."

"You've got strength of character to get away with it."

"I have now," Teddy Armbister admitted, "but my strength of character goes A.W.O.L. after the third drink. I've got a suggestion to make, Mr. Juveen. Put Warner in that job and give me Warner's."

Warner was the manager of the import department.

Mr. Juveen slowly and grimly shook his head. Even his pretense at an affable manner was gone now. He was being crossed; one of his ideas was being resisted. And Mr. Juveen permitted no man to resist his ideas.

"You're going to take that job," he stated.

Teddy's spine momentarily became a racetrack for cold chills. Then his thoughts gathered themselves and dived into the vest pocket where that check from Aunt Priscilla was snugly hiding.

"I'm sorry; I can't take it."

The president of the Pan American Export and Import Corporation glared at him.

"The men in my organization," he said, frigidly, "are so many soldiers. I am the general in command of them. When I give an order, it is to be obeyed."

"I am afraid," was Teddy's somewhat flippant comeback, "that I'll have to resign from your army."

"You're a plain damned fool!"

"No, sir; but if I took that job I would be."

The lips of Mr. Juveen curled into a nasty smile. It was hardly less than a sneer.

"The trouble with you handsome young men," he got out, gratingly, "is that things come to you on silver platters. Damn you, Armbrister, I've been grooming you for five years for this job simply because you *are* a handsome young man. And now—"

"Do you mean," Teddy growled, "my work has been unsatisfactory?"

"How dare you interrupt me!"

"I should like," said Teddy, "to tender my resignation, to be effective immediately."

"You're fired!" roared the man-breaker.

"Two weeks' salary is nothing to sneer at," Teddy murmured as he rose.

III.

"It all happened so suddenly," Teddy Armbrister explained to Clara Jennings, the dimpling dark little beauty with whom he was lunching, "that I don't know just what my plans are going to be. One minute I was a rising young business man, and next minute—I was a falling star."

For some obscure reason, prompted perhaps by instinct, he had failed to mention the windfall from Aunt Priscilla.

Miss Jennings held up her left arm and shook it slightly, a gesture she always employed when she was clearing the decks for conversational action. Approximately forty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds, emeralds and platinum in the form of bracelets slid down toward her elbow as she did so.

"Teddy, dear," she crooned; "I have a perfect whiz of an idea. I'll simply speak to dad. I have something on him, and there's nothing in the world I want from him just now; so I'll get you a job with him. Do—do you like me, Teddy? Aren't I nice to give up, maybe, a mink coat, a pearl necklace or a Hispano-Suiza roadster for you?"

"Of course I like you!" Teddy exclaimed.

"How *much* do you like me?"

"I like you as much as any girl I ever met," Teddy answered, earnestly. "In fact, I like you every bit as much as if you were my own sister."

Miss Jennings looked disappointed, but he had won the point neatly and she only said:

"I'll speak to dad to-night. Will you give me a ring around ten in the morning?"

"If I'm in town," Teddy promised.

It had occurred to him only this moment that he might be going away. In terms of mileage, twenty thousand dollars was a lot of money. It might take him as far away as Timbuctoo or some high peak in Tibet.

"Why not?" he asked himself, with rising enthusiasm, "go away?" And echo answered: "Why not?"

"Where," the lovely girl wanted to know, "are you going?"

"I haven't yet decided," was his honest answer.

Teddy Armbrister spent the afternoon packing his things and, from time to time, consulting the steamer-departure columns of his morning paper. A great many of the places listed sounded far away and enticing, but he was still in a state of indecision when he called for Sylvia Hemmingway that evening.

His only objection to Sylvia was that she persisted in gazing at him with dying-

calf eyes. Otherwise, she was an admirable girl. She had intellect and her judgment was always sound. But to-night her judgment was terrible.

"What you need," said Sylvia with wife-like solicitude, "is a rest. It happens that dad's yacht has just come out of dry dock. Let's get a congenial little crowd together and cruise down to Bermuda or Nassau. We'll have loads of time to think and talk things over thoroughly. We mustn't rush into this. We must go about it with lots of deliberation. Give me a ring about tomorrow noon. It'll only take a few hours to have the yacht fueled and provisioned and we can round up the gang on a moment's notice."

"If I'm in town," Teddy promised.

"Where might you go?" she wailed.

"I don't know," was the young man's honest answer. "I feel the need of getting off some place by myself and thinking things out."

Sylvia was nervously toying with the diamond-and-platinum pendant on her pearl necklace.

"Teddy," she said, severely, "you need some one to look after you. If there is any man in the world who ought to be married, it's you. Honestly, Teddy, you ought to marry."

"I suppose so," Teddy sighed.

She leaned impulsively toward him and her ordinarily high color had faded to a nervous pallor.

"Teddy, why not let's be honest with each other? After all, we're old enough and modern enough to call a spade a spade. We're tremendously fond of each other. And there's so much I could do for you. Honestly, I'm just itching to get my hands on you. You've got more possibilities than any man I've ever known. You think it over. I really mean it. You—you can give me your answer when you call tomorrow noon."

"If I'm in town," said Teddy. "Let's dance."

It was the only way he knew of effectively bottling up Sylvia. She loved to dance and, in her own words, dancing was a language in itself. She detested men who insisted on talking to her while dancing.

Teddy employed that safe medium of communication the rest of the evening and Sylvia became dreamy and detached and inarticulate, a state into which dancing with any man who handled himself as well as Teddy always plunged her.

Shortly before midnight he deposited Sylvia on her doorstep, and decided to walk home. It was a fine, brisk night and an air of adventure was abroad. There were a great many things Teddy wanted to think out; the events of the day had given him quantities of food for thought.

To begin with, he had been working for Mr. Juveen for five years, and where had it got him? He could, to be sure, find himself another job just as good or better than the one he had left, but did he really want another job?

As far as he could see, the way he was living was getting him nowhere but further and further into debt. On a salary of twelve hundred a year, he had spent fifteen hundred. On a salary of five thousand, he had spent six. And on a salary of ten, he had spent more than twelve. Ever since leaving college he had been, not one lope ahead of the wolf, but several lopes behind!

"The trouble with me," Teddy mused, "and the trouble with most of the fellows I know, is that we've developed a set of bad economic habits. We're spending our salary checks a month or two before we get them. We're nothing but a lot of squirrels running as fast as we can in those revolving cages. Some of us have shabby old cages, and some of us do our running in platinum cages with diamond trimmings, but it's the same old principle at work. It's all wrong."

He recalled that a wise old boy had once said that it is far easier to establish a new set of habits in a new environment than in an old one.

Teddy's solemn ponderings were interrupted by a brightly lighted billboard which he suddenly found confronting him. So perfectly did the first sentence he read key in with his thoughts that he started.

Are You Tired of the Life You Are Leading?

"I'll say I am!" was Teddy's response.

Are You Tired of the Clamor, the Clatter, the Crime, the Grind?

"And how!" Teddy murmured.

Would You Like to Get Back to the Eternal Verities, the Sweet Simplicities?

"Would I!" Teddy breathed.

Then Come to Arcadia-On-Ooglagoochee, the Sun-Blest Land of Promise and Opportunity on the Benevolent Bay of Biscayne, in the Heart of Florida's Wonderland, the Fertile Everglades! Make for Yourself a Place in the Sun, a Fortress of Happiness on America's Last Frontier! Be the Master of Your Fate, the Captain of Your Soul With Your Own Plantation Where Oranges and Flowers and the World's Finest Tomatoes Grow the Year 'Round!

Arcadia-On-Ooglagoochee—Ah—

Come to the Land of June Breezes and Flowers—

From Frostbite to Sunburn in Thirty-Six Hours!

A Free Life Insurance Policy With Every Lot! Act now!

"Why think of looking any farther?" Teddy murmured.

IV.

SOME one, whose identity has yet to be established, had some time prior to Teddy Armbister's arrival in the land of grapefruit, sand, sunshine and alligators, inserted a long, sharp pin in the Florida real estate bubble, and when Teddy arrived in Miami, the first impression he gathered was that every person he saw had recently been bereft of the one whom he loved most dearly.

Sufficient time had elapsed since the bubble's collapse for the hair-tearing and teeth-gnashing to be practically over with, and all of Florida had settled down to an intensive mourning over the possession of countless scraps of paper—first, second, third, fourth and fifth mortgages, on which neither time payments nor interest would soon be paid.

A man who possessed cash with which to buy real estate was physically unsafe in Miami in those days. And when Teddy blithely announced that he wished to purchase property, a benevolent individual took him aside and said:

"Young feller, if I was in your boots, I'd

smile when I said that. Down here in Florida those are shooting words."

"But I really want to buy a piece of property," Teddy protested.

"I've got some of the choicest lots in Miami," his mentor promptly assured him. "If you will rent a car, I will gladly pay its rental out of your down payment."

"I want land in Arcadia-on-Ooglagoochee not in Miami," was Teddy's disappointing answer.

He was sorry for the kindly stranger, if, for no other reason, because the kindly stranger's shoes were entirely without soles; but his pity changed to another emotion when, at his hotel that afternoon, eighteen high-pressure real estate salesmen, all in need of haircuts, stormed in on him with choice land in Arcadia-on-Ooglagoochee to sell—at rock-bottom prices.

Conditions are different in Florida now. The populace has recovered from the gibbering panic of those ghastly days. On every hand are to be found optimists who declare that Florida is preparing to stage a wonderful comeback—"After all the money we've spent on improvements down here, it's bound to come back."

But when Teddy Armbister arrived, conditions were comparable only to those on a sinking ship with disabled engines at the mercy of a typhoon with lifebelts gone and all the boats reduced to kindling wood.

Of the eighteen high-power salesmen, one had at one time been a pugilist, and perhaps out of respect of his dangerous past, to him fell the honor of escorting Teddy to the region of perpetual grapefruit, flowers and tomatoes. That business errand bore a resemblance to a parade—or a funeral. Harry Cudlip's—the pugilist—car led the way. A wolfish procession of fifteen followed close behind.

It was a long, warm drive relieved by the passionate intensity with which Battling Cudlip tried to sell Florida real estate sight unseen. The more exotic of Miami's suburban developments, with their Spanish architecture and deserted Venetian canals, were presently left arrear. To the left now shimmered Biscayne Bay and to the right stretched the Everglades.

Teddy Armbister was soon permitted to

discover that, as far as evidence reported by the naked eye was concerned, Arcadia-on-Ooglagoochee was no fairy paradise. The vision of tropical loveliness he had brought South with him faded before a stark reality consisting of raw, ugly drainage ditches—deep, unhealed gashes in the face of nature—and harsh, new land; but over it all marched the incomparable Florida sun and above it arched the imperishable blue of the Florida sky.

And Teddy eventually found a spot that suited him perfectly. One glance at this estate was sufficient to apprise him that its former owner had started in with all the enthusiasm of a new broom, but that he had soon grown weary.

An attractive Spanish bungalow which fronted on the black and sinister Ooglagoochee was painted only on one side; a tool shed and a chicken house were only half completed, and the automobile road in from the highway was rock-surfaced only part way; but five thousand healthy young grapefruit trees thrived in the rich soil and land had been turned elsewhere for the growth of the celebrated tomatoes.

There was work to be done—plenty of muscle-toughening work. This estate, Teddy was sure, would give him ample opportunity to associate with the eternal verities and the sweet simplicities.

"How much?" he asked the anxiously hovering Battling Cudlip.

"This place," the one-time prize fighter began with enthusiasm, "sold dirt cheap to the last owner for eighty-nine thousand dollars. It is one of the finest, choicest home sites and farm sites in Florida, containing as it does upward of two hundred acres of the richest crop land in the world and facing, as it does, the historic and beautiful Ooglagoochee River—"

"I can show you a better farm than this for twenty thousand spot cash," broke in one of the clustering salesmen.

"You can have this for nineteen," snapped Battling Cudlip.

The price seemed absurdly cheap to Teddy Armbrister, but it soon appeared that the matter of price settling was not in his hands, but in those of the eager and competitive salesmen.

He heard the price fall successively from nineteen to eighteen thousand, and from eighteen to seventeen, and from seventeen on all the way down to twelve, at which point Battling Cudlip declared he would see his own mother boiled in coconut oil before he would shave the price of this elegant hundred thousand dollar property another nickel.

"It strikes me as fair enough," said Teddy Armbrister. "I'll take it at that figure."

Some minutes elapsed before the cries of pain and baffled rage died away; and when he could make himself heard again, Teddy said:

"I'll buy the plantation at that figure. I'll put down a five-hundred-dollar binder and pay the balance when some reliable lawyer checks up on the title. Is that satisfactory?"

Tears of gratitude stood in Battling Cudlip's eyes.

"Fellow," he said, "you've bought you a farm, and I'm here to tell you you've snapped up a bargain that would make Shylock himself break down and cry. It's larceny to let this place go at that price, but my commission is going to bail me out of my boarding house and buy me a shirt and a hair cut and a pair of shoes and the right to climb aboard a rattler heading back for the land of the brave and the home of the free."

Such bitter remarks, to be sure, are no longer uttered in Florida. Those who continue to utter piercing wails because of the bubble's collapse are but dimly heard in the rising shouts of the recuperating booster, for Florida is on the way back to normalcy with many a glad yo-ho, and next season or perhaps the one to follow will surely witness a revival paralleling in a modest way the lush and hectic times of the boom.

When the last broken-hearted real estate salesman had wended his weary way back to Miami, Teddy Armbrister, with Battling Cudlip, set about exploring his estate, and the more he saw of it the better he liked it. There was, for example, a little sturdy dock jutting out into the black, coiling current of the Ooglagoochee, although Ted-

dy did not venture out to the end, Mr. Cudlip pointing out to him the fact that the large, grayish-brown log out there was not a log, but an alligator basking in the sun.

The saurian confirmed the salesman's warning at that moment by opening its large, pink mouth and emitting a loud and businesslike hiss.

"Are the alligators thrown in?" Teddy wanted to know.

"Treat them kind," said Mr. Cudlip, "and you'll have them eating right out of your hand."

"How about snakes?" Teddy asked, as they turned and started back toward the bungalow.

"It seems to me I saw one here once," Mr. Cudlip admitted.

"There he goes again," Teddy cried, pointing to a five-foot water moccasin slithering off into the marsh at the river's edge.

"You ought to get you a motor boat," Mr. Cudlip said, hastily. "You got plenty of water there, and Biscayne Bay isn't far off. You can pick up boats for a song. It's a crime the way people are having to give their stuff away, things like boats, pianos and autos. You can pick up a good car for next to nothing. Shall we drive back to town?"

They drove back to town. Teddy made arrangements to have his trunks sent out to his plantation, then bought, first, a car and then a small motor cruiser, both at prices which made him feel ashamed of himself.

He bought a slightly used Buick roadster for two hundred and fifty dollars, which, in the Northern market, would have fetched, at a conservative estimate, nearly a thousand. The boat was even more of a bargain—a thirty-foot sea skiff with a hunting cabin and powered by a new Kermath engine.

He bought this for three hundred and fifty, and it was worth, easily, two thousand. The boat he arranged to have delivered at his dock and the roadster he drove home.

He did not drive straight home. When Teddy was about a mile from his plantation, skimming along the excellent road that led in from the Dixie Highway to

Arcadia-on-Ooglagoochee, he had his first adventure at the hands of a Florida cracker.

V.

THE road ahead of him stretched straight and empty for perhaps a mile, and Teddy Armbister was sure that it was equally empty behind him. Without the slightest warning he heard the familiar and sickening pop-pop-pop of a motor cycle at his left rear wheel.

Instinctively he glanced at his speedometer and found that his speed was somewhere between thirty-six and thirty-seven miles an hour.

The man on the motor cycle had a large red face and a pair of small, blue, close-set eyes. He had big, yellow teeth and big, red, hairy hands.

The motor cycle policeman jerked his thumb toward the side of the road, and Teddy pulled up and stopped. The majesty of the law looked at him for some time before he spoke, then his voice came midway between a growl and a snarl.

"Say," said he, "what do yo' think this is—Daytona Beach?"

"I'm sure," Teddy answered in his best roadside manner, "I wasn't going faster than thirty-two or three, officer."

"Yo' was goin' close on to forty!"

"After all," Teddy argued, "there wasn't anybody else on the road and there aren't any blind intersections ahead. I wasn't conscious of stepping on it, officer. As a matter of fact, I just bought this car, and I certainly wouldn't speed up until I'd made sure it would hang together."

"The speed limit on this road is thirty-five," growled the cracker.

"Good night!" Teddy exploded. "And all I was doing was thirty-six! It seems to me you're drawing the line pretty fine. Look here, officer; I've just bought some property here in Arcadia-on-Ooglagoochee. I'm going to be a permanent resident. I'm not an ordinary tourist."

"Tell it to the judge," the cop headed him off. "Drive along till I tell yo' to stop."

Teddy Armbister was beginning to boil, but he drove along as he had been ordered.

The road took him past his plantation and arrived eventually at a cluster of weather-beaten buildings, on the steps of which loafers sprawled.

These came to life as the roadster, with its escort, came to a stop before one of the smaller buildings. Grins illuminated their sun-reddened faces as the motor cop led the pale Northerner into the building.

Another red-faced individual with small, close-set, blue eyes sat at a flat desk in a large room. His feet were on the desk, but he withdrew them and spat into the spittoon beside him as the officer and Teddy appeared. Loafers gathered in the doorway behind.

"What yo' got hyuh, Tim?" asked the man behind the desk.

"Speedin' case, jedge. Caught him burnin' up th' road 'bout a mile down."

"I was only going thirty-six," Teddy sputtered.

The man behind the desk squinted up at him.

"Speak when yo're spoken to!" he snapped.

"But—"

"Shet up! So yo' was breakin' our speed laws, eh?"

"The speed law here, so this officer tells me, is thirty-five an hour, your honor. I was in a hurry to get back to my farm—I've just bought the Hendricks place. And it seems to me that, inasmuch as I'm going to be a permanent resident here in Arcadia, you might go a little easy on me for my first offense. I was only doing thirty-six."

The judge spat sharply into the spittoon. He picked up a pencil.

"What's yo' name?"

"Theodore Armbrister."

"What's yo' age?"

"Twenty-seven."

"Ever pinched befo'?"

"Never," said Teddy.

"I'm goin' to make an example of yo'," said the judge. "I'm goin' to fine you twenty-five dollars and costs; that brings the total to thirty-seven fifty. Got it on yo'?"

"I think it's a pretty rotten way to treat a man," Teddy blazed, "who's just come into this State and—"

"If you talk back to me jest once mo'," the judge interrupted him, "I'm going to fine yo' fo' contempt! Pay up and shet up!"

Teddy Armbrister shut up and paid up. He returned, smoldering, to his roadster.

He had heard of Jersey justice, but this was his first contact with the Florida kind. He would learn that he had undergone a typical experience; that any Northerner, arrested by a cracker policeman and brought before a cracker judge, has but one alternative: to grin and bear it.

He stopped at the Arcadia grocery store for provisions, then drove on to his bungalow, which he now gave a thorough examination. It consisted of a kitchen, a dining room, a living room, two bedrooms and a bathroom, all of which were partly furnished. There was, at least, enough furniture in them for his present needs.

The sun was setting when he went outside again, and in his enjoyment of the Florida evening he almost forgot his grievance against cracker justice. Red and gold and silver clouds were piled up in castle formation above the jungle on the other side of the river. Afar off he heard the call of an oriole. Palm trees—his own palm trees—whispered in the evening breeze.

It was a soft, soothing breeze, fragrant of the ocean and blossoming orange trees. All in all, he decided, he might have traveled farther and fared worse.

He was, at last, going to live. He had his place in the sun. He would become, in due time, a power to contend with in the grapefruit and tomato world.

And it was something of a thrill for Teddy Armbrister to realize that he had his feet on the ground—his own ground. He owned his own home, and from this land he would wrest his livelihood!

He walked down the drive toward the highway, studying the fields on either side with an enthusiastic if untrained eye. Where the drive met the road he was greeted by a man leading a bay horse that limped slightly in the off forefoot.

The stranger with the horse was an old man with keen eyes, curly white hair and skin the color of water-soaked leather.

"Good evenin', suh!" he exclaimed, and shot out a gnarled brown hand with which he grasped and shook Teddy Armbister's white one. "You're the new owner here, ain't you? Mah name is Johnston. I live up the river a piece. When I done heard you'd boughten this place I said to mah-se'f, 'There's a man who needs a good hoss—bad!' I'm movin' back to Jawgia nex' week, and this yuh hoss is a fine animal and a rare bargain."

Teddy, who knew little about horse-flesh, said: "I'm going to need a saddle horse, but he seems to limp in that front foot."

"A stonebruise, suh—tain't nothin' but a stone bruise. Put him out to pasture two days and that limp'll be done gone!"

"I'm skeptical of horses that limp," Teddy demurred. "My father knew a great deal about horses and I distinctly remember hearing him say, more than once, 'Never buy a strange horse that limps.'"

"I'll have you know, suh," the animal's owner declared, drawing himself very erect with dignity not untinged with indignation, "that I am no hoss dealer. If you doubt my word, I'll put up a wager of fifty dollars in any Miami bank you wish to name, suh, that this hoss will lose that limp inside of a week if you put him out to pasture."

Teddy looked the horse over again.

"He looks thin," he commented.

"This hoss can stand fattenin' up a bit, I'll admit; but his frame is sound. This hoss here is as gentle as a kitten, as sound as a dollar and as smart as a whip.

"How much?" asked Teddy.

"One hundred dollars, suh—and it breaks mah heart to give up this true friend and beautiful animal."

"How old is he?" Teddy wanted to know.

"Goin' on five, suh—goin' on five."

"Well—" Teddy thoughtfully began.

He was interrupted by an alien sound upon the soft evening air, the sound of grunting. Teddy walked into the highway and looked down it, and it seemed to him, suddenly, as if the beautiful evening was full of hogs. An army of them was trot-

ting along, grunting, squealing and rooting at the wayside. Dust swarmed about them.

"Get along there!" a shrill voice cried.

Teddy shielded his eyes with one hand against the almost horizontal rays of the sun. He saw a slim figure in riding breeches, puttees and khaki shirt striding manfully along behind the hogs.

But it was not a man; it was a girl—a young girl with nut-brown cheeks and dancing brown eyes and tip-tilted nose and jaunty bobbed hair. She carried under one arm a blacksnake whip.

When a hog loitered behind its fellows, the girl plucked the whip from under her arm and sent its lash coiling above the back of the loiterer. It gave off a report as loud as a pistol shot and the pig, squealing, galloped to join the herd.

"Get along there!"

Teddy Armbister watched her with amazement. There was a vigor, a self-reliance about her that stirred him.

The girl did not look up from the hogs until she was almost abreast of Teddy and the horse salesman. When she did see him, she straightened up and her lips parted and her eyes lost their squint and became round.

She did not smile. She looked at Teddy Armbister long and searchingly, then she glanced at Mr. Johnston.

"'Evenin', Miss Woodstock," said Mr. Johnston in a voice not overly hearty.

The nut-brown girl nodded at him and looked again at Teddy.

"You the one who just bought this farm?" she asked, and her voice was firm, almost hard.

"I'm the one," Teddy answered, cheerily.

"This old coot trying to unload that horse on you?"

"Now, look yuh, Miss Woodstock—" the horse's owner protested.

"Is there anything the matter with him?" Teddy wanted to know.

"All depends on what you mean by anything," answered Miss Woodstock in her hard young voice. "Aside from that horse being stone-blind in both eyes and having a sprung left foreleg and being spavined and having the heaves and being approxi-

mately thirty-four years old, he's a good buy—if you're in the horse meat business and can get him dirt cheap—and don't object to selling your customers tough horse meat."

Teddy laughed, but she didn't join him. She uncoiled her whip and sent the lash cracking above the army of pigs; then she strode off down the road with the grace of a young goddess.

It was significant that Mr. Johnston said nothing until flaming youth was well beyond earshot. Then, in a small, shrill, angry voice he proclaimed:

"It's a lie!"

"I didn't want him, anyhow," Teddy soothed him. "Don't be sore at Miss Woodstock."

He, himself, was willing to feel quite charitable about Miss Woodstock. She had come into his life as no other girl had done before. He liked the way she bristled, liked the defiance in her eyes. There was an independence about her that appealed to him.

"I ain't sore at her," growled Mr. Johnston, "even if she did go a mile out of her way to spoil a sale for me. And let me warn you, young feller, that that gal is highly deceivin' to the naked eye. She ain't nothin' but thorns and briars and cussedness. There ain't a gentle spot in her. You think she's jest got through doin' yo' a good turn. She wa'n't a-tall. She was goin' a mile out of her way to do a bad turn. And I'm the goat!"

"Oh, so's your old horse!" Teddy said, indignantly. And Mr. Johnston gazed at him thoughtfully.

"Yes, suh," he agreed, "most men feel that way when they first clamp eyes on that little hellion. She's purty and cute and she's got big brown eyes and a elegant little figure and yo' say to yo'se'f, 'My, ain't she a little darlin'.' An' yo imagine yo'se'f cuddlin' her up in yo' big, strong arms."

"I'm sayin': Jest wait till yo' know her. If she had a daddy or a mammy, mebbe she'd be a tol'able nice gal, but she lives down yonder all alone, raisin' them hogs—and makin' life a misery fo' everybody in these yuh parts. Do yo' s'pose the folks

yuh in Arcadia-on-Ooglagoochee call her th' bully o' Biscayne Bay 'cause she's sweet and nice like she looks?"

"Do they call her that?" Teddy gasped.

"I'm tellin' yo', Mr. Armbrister."

"Why?" the Northerner demanded.

"You do yo' own findin' out," said Mr. Johnston, unpleasantly. He picked up his horse's bridle, and started off up the road.

VI.

LONG after Mr. Johnston had vanished into the purple twilight, Teddy Armbrister stood at the gate and gazed dreamily off down the road. He was trying to reconcile the girl with the blacksnake whip with the girl Mr. Johnston had vaguely but sinisterly pictured. The bully of Biscayne Bay!

His curiosity grew as he picked his way along the driveway to his bungalow, and it continued to grow as he prepared and ate his supper. He decided to call on her. After all, she was a neighbor, and it would be wise to establish a friendly footing with a girl whose reputation was so formidable.

In his heart, Teddy did not believe a word Mr. Johnston had told him. Teddy prided himself not a little on his ability to judge human nature, and his snap judgment of Miss Woodstock had been entirely favorable. She was, he was certain, a splendid girl with a great deal of character and personality.

Teddy started his car and drove slowly down the road in the direction she had taken. His headlights picked out presently a neat white sign bearing the single word Woodstock.

He turned into the sandy lane up which the sign pointed; drove between rows of cabbage palms. The lane brought him at length to a clearing at the far end of which stood a small white cottage.

Teddy switched off his lights, and started toward the cottage afoot. Miss Woodstock had evidently spent a great deal of time improving her property.

Near the house was a grove of orange and grapefruit trees, which a rising moon informed him were bearing. There was a pergola near the well upon which bougain-

villae grew. And he walked upon a lawn that was green and well trimmed.

A light showed at several of the downstairs windows, and Teddy Armbister pictured the pleasant, cozy interior; went on and pictured evenings that he would probably spend here, chatting with Miss Woodstock of crops and this and that.

He had forgotten that he had come to Florida because he hated women; yet Miss Woodstock was really different. She was more like a man. She looked like the kind of girl who would make a wonderful companion, a real pal.

Come to think of it, the two of them ought to be able to have a lot of fun together down here. They could take rides in the roadster, and have some jolly picnics in the Captain Kiddo, his motor cruiser.

In that short walk from his car, Teddy Armbister thought of all this—and more. He told himself that Miss Woodstock would look like a million dollars in a bathing suit.

And so innocent in his mind was Teddy Armbister that he did not for a moment suspect that he had fallen a victim to the most devastating, most fatal disease known to mankind. One glimpse of Miss Woodstock had been sufficient to wreak this havoc upon him, yet not until later would he realize how sorely he was stricken.

At that moment, anyhow, his brain ceased functioning entirely. From a vague shadow near the cottage, a bristling, terrifying monster had hurled itself. The thing came toward Teddy Armbister with vicious, horrible snarls.

There was no time for deliberation. In college, Teddy had been on the running team. He had been especially good at the hundred-yard dash, but it is doubtful if he ever covered that distance in his collegiate days as expeditiously as he covered it to-night.

Some latent instinct, handed down to Teddy from an arboreal ancestor who had perhaps been pursued by a hungry saber-toothed tiger, came to his aid as the monster charged.

Teddy fairly flew across the clearing to the nearest tree. It was a sturdy grapefruit tree. At least, it appeared to be a

grapefruit tree. In any event, it was a tree.

He leaped into its branches; pulled himself out of harm's way just as the savage beast leaped through the air. Its drooling jaws clamped like a bear-trap upon the trouser-cuff of Teddy's disappearing left leg and came away with a square foot of panting.

The rising moon afforded Teddy a better glimpse of the beast. It was leaping into the air with great lunges, falling back to the ground and leaping again, and filling the night with bloodthirsty snarls and barks. It was a huge, thoroughly savage mongrel dog.

The kitchen door of the cottage opened and the slim figure of Miss Woodstock was silhouetted there. Under her arm she carried a double-barreled shotgun. In her other hand she held an electric torch.

She flashed on the light and peered into the branches where Teddy Armbister breathlessly clung.

"Cæsar!" she called softly. The savage animal barked and leaped again.

"What have you got up that tree, Cæsar? Another skunk?"

Teddy chuckled. After all, the situation was not without humor—a young man calling upon a young lady and treed by her savage watchdog!

"It's only Armbister," he called down. "Your next-door neighbor." He chuckled again. "I just dropped in to say hello and I'll tell the world you're well protected! I guess you'd better chain him up."

Miss Woodstock did not reply at once. She walked leisurely from the doorway to a spot about twenty feet away from the tree and threw the beam of the torch into the branches.

Teddy smiled good-naturedly into the dazzling spot of white light.

"Are you armed?" she asked.

"Armed?" he cried. "Of course not! Why should I be armed?"

"Anybody who tries to shoot this dog," she answered, "is going to have me to reckon with."

"I hadn't the slightest intention of hurting your dog," said Teddy. "I simply dropped in for a little visit."

"Well," said the girl with the hard, young voice, "go ahead and have it."

"It might be more comfortable," he laughed, "if we could sit down somewhere. Please," he begged, still believing that she was joking with him, "chain up Cæsar and let me come down."

"What do you suppose," she snapped, "I keep him for?"

That gave Teddy some food for thought.

"You don't mean," he said, presently, in an incredulous voice, "that you think I came over here in any but a friendly spirit?"

"I don't doubt it in the least," affirmed Miss Woodstock. "So many of you fellows have come here after dark in nothing but a friendly spirit that I'm going to shoot the next one on sight!"

"You're joking!" Teddy gasped.

"Try climbing down out of that tree," Miss Woodstock ominously suggested, "and see whether or not this dog thinks I'm joking."

There was another long pained silence amidst the branches.

"I suppose," said Teddy then, "that, because you're living here alone, a lot of them have tried to take advantage."

"Your guesswork is improving."

"But I haven't any designs on you, Miss Woodstock. I came over principally to thank you for saving me from getting stung in that horse deal; and I thought, as long as we're neighbors, we might as well know each other."

"I knew you were a sheik," was the girl's answer, "the moment I saw you. Maybe this will teach you a lesson. Watch him, Cæsar."

Teddy Armbrister's blood was rapidly reaching the boiling point. It boiled at her next words.

"After you've stayed up there awhile, maybe you'll realize that it isn't wise to come sneaking and skulking around the property of unprotected girls."

"Johnston was right!" Teddy roared. "You're nothing in the world but a little bully! You probably think it's very funny to keep me up in this tree but the joke isn't in very good taste. Go ahead and pull the trigger of that damned shotgun! It would

be just like you to shoot an innocent, unarmed man!

"I've met some mean people in my life, but you Florida crackers are the meanest I've ever known! You aren't half civilized—any of you! I want to tell you that the welcome I've had to-day in Arcadia-on-Ooglagoochee is enough to drive me back North to-morrow! Unfair motor cops, unfair judges, crooked old horse thieves—and now you!"

"Just for that," said Miss Woodstock, "I'm not going to let you down out of there until morning! I'm not a cracker. I'm from Michigan. And you're exactly what I thought you were. Cursing and raving! Calling me names!"

"The bully of Biscayne Bay!" Teddy shouted. "All right. Keep that wild animal there as long as you please. I'm going to eat every damned grapefruit on this tree!"

"I hope you enjoy them," caroled the girl with the flash light, and this time she actually laughed. "Only they don't happen to be grapefruit. They're ponderosa lemons—nice big sour lemons! Help yourself!"

There was deep silence in the lemon tree.

"I'm sorry I can't be more hospitable," Miss Woodstock said sweetly, her voice bearing every evidence that she was enjoying the situation thoroughly; "and let you climb down and pick yourself out a nice orange tree—but I don't trust men."

Teddy said nothing.

"Ask me," she invited him, switching the light on and off and on again in his face, "why I don't trust men."

Teddy declined to enter the conversation.

"I'll tell you, anyway," said Miss Woodstock. "When my father and mother died a couple of years ago, I had two visitors one night. Two men. They were pretty drunk. They came right into the house. I was never so scared in my life. But I slept with a pistol under my pillow, and I had presence of mind to drag it out when they came in

"I shot one of them through the hand and they ran away. But these crackers are hard to convince. They seem to think that when a girl lives off all alone as I'm

doing—something must be wrong with her. So I treat them all rough. The last caller I had climbed a tree, too. I kept him up there until noon the next day."

"You might have used a little judgment," Teddy said, hotly. "You know I'm not a cracker."

"All men are alike," said Miss Woodstock, wearily. "I've been fighting for my existence—fighting men—ever since my father and mother died. There isn't a man in this section I haven't learned to distrust and despise. As a matter of fact, there isn't a man on earth I don't distrust."

"I can assure you," said Teddy, bitterly, "that there is one man in this section you won't have to worry about."

"Climbing a tree in a hurry does make most of them think twice," she agreed.

The lemon tree remained silent for several seconds.

"I am sorry for you," said Teddy. "You've had some unfortunate experiences and they've soured you."

"I've had to fight every inch of the way," said Miss Woodstock.

"Fighting friends isn't going to get you anywhere," pointed out the philosopher of the lemon tree.

"I haven't any friends."

"That isn't their fault."

"I don't want any friends. I'm willing to carry on my own fight alone—and capable, too. I love to fight! Life has always been a fight to me. My father and mother were always fighting. How can a girl with a name like mine help being quarrelsome? He was a Northerner; my mother was a Southerner. I'm a mixture of the blue and the gray—of oil and water. They finally agreed on Georgia Michigan."

"Will you kindly call off that dog?"

"No, Mr. Armbrister; I'm going to keep you up there until morning."

"Chain up that dog!" Teddy snapped. "I'm coming down!"

"You'd better not! He'll tear you to pieces!"

Teddy wrenched the nearest ponderosa lemon from its stem. The round, hard fruit must have weighed at least two pounds. He leaned out from his branch and aimed it carefully.

He hurled the lemon with such force that he all but fell out of the tree. But the missile sped true to its mark. It struck the ferocious monster full on the nose. Caesar howled, tucked his tail between his legs and slunk off toward the house.

"So that's the kind of a dog you own!" jeered the amazed and delighted young man in the tree.

Georgia Michigan Woodstock appeared to be too astonished to say anything. She kept the white beam on him, however, while he shinnied down the tree with an armful of the giant lemons and hurled another at Caesar, who had paused at the porch steps and faced about with an air of extreme uncertainty.

As the lemon thudded on the ground near him, Caesar yelped and vanished moaning under the house.

"Don't shoot," said Teddy, sternly, in the voice of one now thoroughly in command of the situation. "I am going—and I am not coming back. May my parting words ring in your ears for a long, long time, Georgia Michigan! Here they are: It's a damned shame you aren't as nice as you look! Good night!"

"Both barrels of this shotgun are loaded," said Georgia Michigan Woodstock. "I am going to count five, and at the end of five, I am going to pull both—"

"Don't be silly!" Teddy gasped.

"One!" said the deadly voice.

"I want to tell you—" Teddy began, hotly.

"Two!"

Teddy Armbrister was not a coward. He simply knew when discretion came before valor. The time was now.

Georgia Michigan had turned off her flash light, and her slim figure seemed to emerge from black nothingness into the light of the honey-colored moon, straight and self-reliant and more than a little menacing. The moonlight gleamed on both barrels.

Miss Woodstock wore a white dress. Girls in white had always exerted a strange and powerful influence on Teddy Armbrister. Girls in white in the light of a moon had always been irresistible to Teddy.

But this one filled him with the hot, gnawing rage of bafflement and humiliation.

She looked like the kind of girl who would shoot at the conclusion of her counting.

Teddy departed with dignity. He walked, not ran, to the nearest exit. The area between his shoulder blades itched and tingled and crept; but he did not accelerate his pace. Disgraceful though his retreat may have been it was gentlemanly.

He heard her say "four," but at the word "five," he must have been beyond earshot. Walking swiftly over the neatly trimmed lawn toward the dark bulk of his roadster at the end of the lane, what he heard was a strange, gasping sound, as if, perhaps, that arrogant, uncivilized girl were smothering laughter beneath a hand.

A hotter tide of humiliation swept into his already steaming face and he found, as he climbed into his roadster, that he was clammy with perspiration and so tremulous with destructive emotions that his foot, touching the accelerator pedal, shook like a leaf.

He would, somehow, show her! Somehow he would make her suffer as she had made him suffer—the little bully!

VII.

TEDDY ARMBISTER, returning through the moon-drenched, sweetly perfumed night to his plantation, became a battlefield of emotions. He wanted to take Georgia Michigan Woodstock by the shoulders and shake her until her teeth rattled.

Never in his life had he been so humiliated. And as a result of thinking over his misadventure from every angle, he did not fall asleep until nearly daylight.

He heard the alligators barking in the jungle across the river; he heard the night birds calling to their mates; he heard the chirping of insects and the murmur of the trade wind in the palms; he heard the far-away, lonesome whistle of a train.

The first faint gray of dawn was at his windows when he fell asleep, and he fell asleep upon the discovery that he wanted to hurt and humiliate Georgia Michigan Woodstock more than he had ever wanted to do anything in his life.

He awoke toward noon to the reflection that he had been done a great, burning in-

justice. His pride still throbbed from the rudeness with which it had been treated.

But he realized, sensibly, as he prepared himself his breakfast coffee and fried some eggs, that by far the wiser course would be to treat Georgia Michigan Woodstock as one who did not exist.

Teddy set about the business of becoming a power in the Florida grapefruit and tomato world with that commendable resolution. He hired a negro to look after his grove. He bought books and sent away for a vast amount of literature dealing with the culture of citrus fruit.

He purchased—for a song—a Fordson tractor and resolutely set about learning the art of making several things grow where only one thing had grown before.

It was his praiseworthy intention not to be a gentlemanly farmer. The time would, of course, come when his rolling acres would demand all of his time in an executive way; but until that time came he was determined to roll up his sleeves and work.

Accordingly, he plowed, he harrowed, he raked. For a few days his backbone became a deep and continuous ache; but he was in good physical condition when he came to Florida, and it was not long before he toughened.

He set out, with rather a flourish, ten acres of tomatoes and five of yams. And a Sunday came when he could pause and look about upon the work he had done and call it good.

His ambition to put this farm of his on a paying basis was further fired by a somewhat vague necessity of showing "that girl next door." Obviously, she looked upon him with the contempt of an old settler for a tenderfoot; and he was, among other things, going to show her that he was a better man than she was.

This splendid aim was further fired, for a reason even more difficult to assay, on that particular Sunday when he looked about him and called his handiwork well done. He was tired of trudging about in the harsh, lumpy white soil; tired of the scuttling land crabs; tired of the odor in his nostrils of the tractor's exhaust. Obeying a whim, he drove over to Miami Beach for a swim.

And the first person his eyes encountered as he emerged from the bath house where he had rented a swimming suit was Georgia Michigan Woodstock.

Miss Woodstock was alone, reclining in the warm, soft, red sand, looking off dreamily over the jade water. She wore a one-piece, snugly tailored bathing suit of an arresting crimson, which revealed certain facts of which he had not been entirely unsuspicious before.

It had been Teddy Armbrister's observation, based upon years of attendance at Northern beaches, that girls with figures always affected bathing suits modest in color; that the scrawny ones and the over-size ones were solely addicted to wearing alarming colors. He found himself now confronted by that rarest of all things—an exception to a rule.

Georgia Michigan Woodstock, as the briefest of glances informed him, had the kind of figure that made Mack Sennett famous. She was slim and perfectly proportioned and blessed with those subtle, delightful curves which, through the ages, have made the hearts of all men leap with a strange, exciting pleasure.

Her skin, that same breathless glance advised him, was a glorious golden brown. Apparently, she was a frequent patron of the ocean.

It was hard to say why his hatred of her should have flamed to new heights at this glimpse of her alluring perfection; but it did. And when Georgia Michigan looked up from her dreams across the sea, as she presently did, it was with a certain shocked dismay at this pale, furious young man who stood, not far away, glaring down at her as if she were, perhaps, some loathsome monster just dragged up on the beach from the slimy deeps.

That look of Teddy's and his unexpected presence shocked her, as it were, to her feet. She sprang up, still with that dismayed, incredulous look in her eyes; hesitated briefly, then walked with a stately stride into the ocean.

He watched her go. It seemed to make him madder still when he saw what beautiful, slim shoulders she had, and how proudly she carried her small, trim head.

He saw her ankles laved by jade wavelets; and she walked on. When she was knee-deep, she dived, reappearing a dozen feet beyond slipping across the green water with the six-beat crawl.

Teddy Armbrister strode on down the beach, and the sun seemed to have become of a sudden millions of stinging, white-hot needles lacerating his flesh and searing his soul.

There was a big raft afloat some distance out and he swam to this. He told himself that Georgia Michigan Woodstock had ruined his day and that hereafter he would patronize one of the other beaches.

The raft, when he reached it, was deserted. He hauled himself out and stretched out on his stomach and told himself he was an idiot to let this uncivilized girl agitate him this way. Hereafter, he would keep himself under control. He would treat her as if she did not exist. He would show her how unimportant he considered her.

He may have dozed. All at once, in any case, he was aroused by a puffing and a splashing and he opened his eyes to look squarely into the dripping, lovely face of Georgia Michigan Woodstock, a Diana in crimson arising from the waves.

Georgia Michigan gasped. She was so surprised that she relinquished her hold on the raft and fell back into the water. Teddy knew that she had not swam out here to make him miserable; that this was nothing but one of those damnable coincidences. It was impossible for him to accept the situation gracefully.

She was climbing back again now. Obviously, she wasn't going to let him spoil *her* day. He dived as the white belt around her waist appeared. He dived and he swam for shore, and it was a wonder that the water through which he swam did not turn to steam.

An evil, capricious fate seemed determined to make him miserable. Everywhere he turned he seemed to come face to face with Georgia Michigan Woodstock. And it seemed, too, as if they were the only unattached couple on the beach.

Love was in the air that glorious Sunday afternoon; the beach was covered with couples. The water was full of couples.

Only he and Georgia Michigan Woodstock seemed to be alone.

When he went into the adjoining lunch-room Miss Woodstock was seated there, munching a sandwich. It was, he thought, as he seated himself, a silly situation. Here they both were, alone and unattached; if it hadn't been for her bristling disposition, the bully in her, they might now be lunching together; they might go swimming together this afternoon; they might, discreetly and innocently, hold hands as the shades of night drew on; they might drive home together in the light of the ardent, amorous Florida moon.

But instead of doing any of these pleasant, natural, civilized things, they sat at different tables munching sandwiches, one ignoring the existence of the other.

How he hated that overproud, oversuspicious little beauty! Some day, somehow, he would humble her; bring her to her knees.

He returned to Arcadia-on-Ooglagoochee that evening, sunburned and tired. He slept poorly, because of the sunburn, and his dreams dealt with pigs.

Teddy had never cared for pigs; he had always looked upon them as dirty, detestable creatures, and since his bitter experience at the hands of his next-door neighbor, his opinion of those beasts had not been improved.

Teddy awoke with a grouch and to a persistent banging on his back door. He looked out of the window to find Dan Mitchel, his roustabout, hitting the door with measured strokes. Inquiry elicited the maddening information that, some time during the night Miss Woodstock's hogs had got into his tomatoes and yams. They were still in there.

Teddy saw seven distinct shades of crimson, snatched up a pair of overalls, writhed into them and dashed out of the house with a repeating rifle in his hand and murder in his eyes.

Happy grunts greeted him as he approached the first of his tomato fields. Devastation met his eyes as far as they would reach.

Orderly rows of young plants were broken, trampled, uprooted. In the yam fields,

vandals were grunting, squealing with delight, and rooting up seedlings as if it were a delightful game.

As Teddy began massacring hogs, a species of vicious animal delight crept through his veins. He was, at long last, getting his revenge on that Woodstock girl; not the precise kind of revenge he had anticipated, but one just as good, or better, and thoroughly, legally, morally, justified.

He'd teach that girl to let her hogs roam around, wantonly destroying the property of others. He'd teach her a lesson she wouldn't soon forget.

Dan Mitchel watched his handiwork with the fascinated round eyes with which the black race has forever attended the caprices of the white. From time to time he chuckled softly.

Teddy shot fourteen hogs before the despoilers fled beyond range. He then instructed Dan to hitch up the wagon, load up the dead hogs and deliver them at Miss Georgia Michigan Woodstock's back door. He wished he could have accompanied Dan; he wanted to see the expression on Miss Woodstock's face when that load of dead pigs was dumped in her back yard.

But that would have been rubbing it in and, besides, knowing the firecracker nature of her character, he was certain that she would pay him a visit before very long.

He was eating his breakfast when Georgia Michigan Woodstock rode up to his back door on a white mule named Rabbit. She was followed by Dan and the wagon. The wagon, Teddy saw, still bore its freight of four-legged corpses.

"Unload them right there, Dan," said Miss Woodstock in a sweet, calm voice.

Teddy Armbrister emerged from the house. He was enjoying the situation hugely, but he wasn't smiling.

He was, however, a little surprised when he saw that there were no tears in her eyes, no evidence, indeed, of any emotion in her face. She presented a cool, beautiful and businesslike appearance.

"You shot these hogs of mine, didn't you, Mr. Armbrister?" she inquired.

"I believe I did," was Teddy's equally brisk answer; but he resisted the temptation, even then, to rub it in.

He had vindicated himself; had wiped away the blot he had acquired in her lemon tree; he could afford to be pleasant and even a little patronizing.

"Why?" she asked.

"They broke into my tomato and yam fields last night," he replied. "I suppose it would be a good idea, after this, to keep your live stock locked up."

"I value these hogs," said Miss Woodstock, "at fifteen dollars a head—on the hoof. That means a total of just two hundred and ten dollars. I'll take your check for it if you haven't that amount in cash handy."

Teddy now smiled. He grinned. He chuckled.

"Try," he chuckled, "and collect it."

"You don't mean," the girl exclaimed, "that you're going to be foolish enough to force me to take such an open-and-shut case into court!"

"If you think you can collect it by taking me into court," was Teddy's cheerful answer to that, "go right ahead and take me into court!"

"I hate to go to the bother of getting an injunction on your property," Georgia Michigan Woodstock told him. "It would really be much cheaper for you to pay me now. Court procedure isn't any cheaper in Florida than anywhere else, and you haven't a chance, you know."

"We'll see about that," Teddy grimly retorted.

Her cocksureness was making him feel a little uneasy; but he wasn't going to let this little bully bluff him. He'd spend his last dime fighting her.

"I really mean that, Mr. Armbrister. You haven't a chance in court."

"We'll see about that," Teddy repeated. "Your hogs got into my fields and destroyed my crops. No court in the world is going to say I haven't the right to shoot animals that break into my fields and destroyed my crops."

He expected to see her bristle at that, but she remained serene and calm.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Armbrister, that you haven't heard of the fence laws in this State. Those laws say that the landowner must properly fence his land to keep out

cattle. If they break in, it's the fault of the fences. That's the law. It's up to you to make your fences hogproof. That's why I say that if you take this case into court you haven't a chance."

"I'll take it anyway!" Teddy snapped.

"Very well," she said, indifferently. "I'll give you until to-morrow night to have a check for two hundred and ten dollars in my hands. If I haven't that check by to-morrow night, the case goes to a lawyer."

She wheeled her mule about upon that ultimatum and started down the road. Teddy Armbrister glared at Dan Mitchel.

"Is that right about the Florida fence laws?" Teddy demanded.

"Yes, suh," said the roustabout.

"I don't believe it!"

"No, suh; Ah knows yuh don't."

Teddy Armbrister got into his roadster and drove down to Arcadia. He told his troubles to Bill Pocock, who ran the Arcadia grocery store and post office.

Bill Pocock was by nature a gloomy individual. He became gloomier and gloomier as Teddy recited his adventure with Miss Woodstock's hogs.

"I was perfectly justified," Teddy raved. "Those hogs were rooting up my yams and my tomato plants. I had a perfect right to shoot every damned one of them!"

"Not in this here State," interjected the gloomy grocery store proprietor. "She has the law on her side. The farmers have been tryin' for years to get the fence laws repealed in the legislature, but the cattle men around the interior are too strong for 'em. All you can do, Mr. Armbrister, is to keep your fences tight and your gates closed."

"At that rate," said Teddy indignantly, "it would pay her, when business was poor, to open people's gates at night and coax the hogs to go in so people would get mad and shoot them and she could collect for them!"

"Folks around here," Mr. Pocock pointed out with a weary sigh, "have learned to keep their fences and their gates shut tight and their tempers under control. We've argued and cajoled and threatened that girl, but she just sets back and gives us the hoss laugh. We've offered to buy her hogs

at the market price if she'd promise to stop raisin' 'em and go in for grapefruit or garden stuff, but she allows she don't want to farm. Her daddy raised hogs and what was good enough for her daddy is good enough for her. She's just stubborn, and them hogs of hers have done more damage around this section than the thrips and the last freeze."

"Then all I can do," said Teddy bitterly, "is to settle up and shut up?"

"That's all," affirmed Mr. Pocock.

"The damned little bully!" growled Teddy.

"That's what we call her," agreed the grocery store man.

"I'll show her!" said the hog murderer.

"You better get up before the sun does," Mr. Pocock advised him.

Teddy returned to his plantation filled with anger and loathing. The time was now past when he could consider Georgia Michigan Woodstock as a girl with charming or alluring attributes. She had become a menace, a deadly enemy, and hereafter he was going to deal with her on that basis.

His peace of mind was not materially added to by his discovery on making a survey of the damage the hogs had done to his tomatoes and yams, that his loss would amount to approximately three hundred dollars.

She had, in brief, cost him, to date, something more than five hundred dollars and a pride-crushing half hour in a lemon tree. And there was, looking at it any way one pleased, no weak spot in her armor. She was impervious to attack from any direction. Damn her!

Teddy Armbrister fell to brooding about it. He had never, so far back as he could remember, had cause to hate anybody before.

He had been an easy going, sunny, amiable young man, and unless something was done about it, he was going to transform himself into an old grouch. This girl had him under her heel—had had him under her heel, in some way or another, since his first day in Florida. There wasn't, apparently, a kindly, good, human spot in her. She was nothing but a bully.

He mailed her a check for two hundred and ten dollars.

And two nights later an incident occurred—rather, a stirring adventure—which left Teddy Armbrister stunned and bewildered.

An unexpected, early spring freeze struck at the citrus groves of all Florida.

VIII.

TEDDY ARMBISTER had spent the evening reading a thick, finely printed book describing the sundry ailments to which grapefruit and orange trees were heir; but he had not been able to concentrate. He had progressed as far as the chapter on aphids and the employment of nicotine sulphate when the tantalizing face of Georgia Michigan Woodstock floated between his eyes and the type.

For some minutes he sat glowering at the page. It had occurred to him that the girl next door bore a close resemblance to these aphids, those vile little insects which attacked and destroyed peaceable and profitable trees. They, too, were ruthless and all but vulnerable. You sprayed them with nicotine sulphate and they shriveled and died. He would like to spray Georgia Michigan Woodstock with nicotine sulphate in a concentrated form.

The vision of her face now took full possession of his consciousness. It was bewitchingly lovely; her eyes were glowing softly with a dream. Now the picture changed. Her eyes were snapping and sparkling with enmity; her lips were drawn in a tight little grimace.

What maddened him was the prank his disordered mind persisted in playing on him. He would place his hands firmly upon that round, slender neck; he would shake her this way and that so vigorously that her feet would dangle about in the breeze like tassels. And at that point his mind would play the prank.

Suddenly, her eyes would brim with tears. Sobs of repentance, contrition—surrender—would shake her body; and the scene next would portray him holding her fiercely in his arms and kissing the tears away.

Teddy Armbrister fired the book on citrus culture into the farthest corner. A spider with a body an inch through, brooding in

the darkness there, leaped five feet up the wall and glared with hateful dead eyes.

The young man went to bed, but not to sleep. He tossed for some hours before, finally, he slipped off into a topsy-turvy land where hogs swam in a jade sea in pursuit of animated ponderosa lemons while he and Georgia Michigan, hand in hand on a rocking raft, cheered them on.

He was awakened by a loud and hated voice.

"Mr. Armbister! Mr. Armbister!" And a reiterated thumping on his back door.

Teddy sat up shivering. There was a keen nip in the air. He went, with chattering teeth, to the window and looked down. All below was darkness, but off to the east he discerned the ruddy glow of fire. His first thought was triumphant.

The fire was in the direction of the Woodstock place. Georgia Michigan's place was in flames; she had come over to him for help—to him! With what pleasure he would tell her to go to the devil when she made her appeal.

"What is it?" he growled.

Her voice came up, clear and thrilling with excitement:

"There's a freeze! Aren't you doing anything about it? The thermometer's down to twenty-six!"

"I—I'll—be r-right d-down!" the young man stuttered.

He didn't have time to feel grateful. Later on, he might wonder at this humanitarian act on the part of the Bully of Biscayne Bay; but there was only room now for the overwhelming thought that the thermometer didn't dare go much lower or his trees would burst!

Teddy found her already at work at the smoke pots in his grove when he reached there—clad only in overalls pulled on over his pyjamas. The glow from the pot she was feeding showed him a smudged, be-smoked face.

Georgia Michigan, too, had evidently wasted little time in dressing. She was wearing nothing, apparently, but an old white shirt, a man's shirt, tucked into a pair of corduroy breeches. Those and bed-room slippers.

He was so stunned at the sight of her

here—voluntarily helping him save his grove—that he was helpless.

"It was certainly kind—" he blurtingly began.

"Get busy on that next line of pots!" she snapped. "Light every alternate one on the way down, and the unlit ones on the way back. Where's that black of yours?"

"Dan?" Teddy said dazedly.

"Never mind! Snap into it!"

Very much later it would occur to Teddy Armbister that, in these past weeks, he had been giving over too much thought to this girl and too little to the business of running his property properly. The pots should have been in readiness. Some of them now were full of dirt and uninflam-mable rubbish. These had to be cleaned out and refueled.

He took up a torch and went down between the lines of trees, firing alternate smoke pots as he went. It already seemed much colder to him than when he had first come out.

He was fully awake and his mind was quite clear by the time he reached the end of the pots. He realized that this freeze had come at the worst time of the year—when the sap was well up into the trees.

Now they would burst even if slightly nipped. Some few of the trees, in the southern end of the grove, were already beginning to blossom; those blossoms would undoubtedly be frozen and next fall's crop lost.

The hours that remained of that night were, to Teddy Armbister, endowed with most of the qualities of a hideous nightmare. His eyes began to smart and sting.

Pots glowed like evil red eyes as far as he could see. The grove became filled with a sour smelling pall of smoke. Through this smoke, from time to time, he saw the fantastic figure of Georgia Michigan Woodstock, dancing a savage kind of dance as she flitted from smokepot to smokepot with a blazing brand.

She sent him presently to the woodpile. Dan had neglected to chop up whole quarter-length fat-wood logs for kindling. Teddy chopped until he steamed with perspiration.

Georgia Woodstock carried a thermom-

eter about with her. Her early reports were disheartening.

"Twenty-five and a half! Chop more wood!"

She would pick up an armful and stagger off into the smoke. It struck Teddy that she was a heroic figure. He could not reconcile this brave girl with the vindictive, cruel creature whom all his previous dealings had concerned.

By the time the first cold steely light of dawn striped the eastern horizon, Teddy was exhausted. He swore he couldn't lift that ax up for another stroke. His lungs were burning dry; his throat, despite frequent visits to a water bucket, was parched, and his eyes felt swollen and inflamed.

The girl's eyes were red-rimmed and almost shut, and her complexion was negroid. The white shirt was slate-gray and tattered. Her voice, from smoke and superhuman effort, had become almost a husky whisper.

The temperature in the grove had crept up to twenty-nine and a half. If they could keep it above that point until the sun came up, the grove would be saved.

The aching efforts of that dreadful night, with the irritating events which had preceded it, were a little too much for the young Northerner.

When the first ray of the sun struck into the fog of smoke, he collapsed. And he carelessly selected as a spot on which to fall, one not a yard from where Georgia Woodstock sat on an upturned crate with her head in her hands.

IX.

CONSCIOUSNESS began again with the clammy sensation of an icy rag being swabbed over his face. It took Teddy Armbrister several long seconds to adjust himself to the amazing discovery that Georgia Michigan Woodstock, the girl without a heart, held his head in her lap and was weeping bitterly over him even while the work of restoration went forward.

It seemed to Teddy, as his brain cleared, that things had progressed very naturally and nicely to the only possible conclusion. He had been in love with her ever since the night Cæsar had sent him flying into the lemon tree's branches, and his growing

hatred of her had been nothing but an inverted kind of love.

Now everything was cleared up; the freeze had brought them together; bygones would be bygones, and they would work out their destiny hand in hand and heart to heart.

It was this gratifying line of reasoning that brought Teddy Armbrister to his feet and at once precipitated the folly that followed.

She was drying her own eyes on the same rag with which she had swabbed him back to consciousness when he put the impulse into motion.

Teddy looked for an inspired moment at that slender, beloved figure; at the tousled hair, full of twigs and leaves, at the deplorable shirt. Her face, in the rising sun, was pink under the layer of soot. He thought she looked adorable.

Miss Woodstock wasn't aware of his advance until he had gathered her fiercely into his arms and had tried to kiss her. And for a supreme moment he was happy with the sensation of her, hot and limp and yielding, in his arms.

Then she struck him on the nose with her fist. She struck him with such violence that he reeled and staggered back four or five steps before he recovered his balance.

She summed him up in a cutting, coarse backwoods phrase as he stared dazedly at her.

"You're lower than a snake's stomach!"

"But—" Teddy protested, gasping. "For the love of Mike, Georgia, I love you!"

Her swollen eyes blazed at him with fury.

"You haven't a right to try anything like that. If you don't know by this time that I don't like you, you never will! I suppose you think I came over here and helped you keep this grove from freezing because I'm crazy about you!"

She got some control over herself then. The rage left her, and she was again her cold, suspicious young self.

He muttered: "God knows, I'm crazy enough about you!"

"I came over here," she said, between

tight, dry lips, "because I couldn't bear the thought of these trees dying because of your stupidity! I saw there weren't any fires over here and I came over, knowing you'd be sound asleep!"

"I'm mighty thankful," the crushed young man assured her.

"You needn't thank me at all. Seeing that those trees didn't freeze is all the thanks I want. If they could speak they'd tell you to go on back North where you belong."

"I haven't ever done a damned thing to you to make you act like this," Teddy blazed. "I've been more than willing to be friends with you from the very start. I don't see where you're going to get, antagonizing everybody the way you do. It isn't any of my business, except—"

"It certainly isn't," she stopped him. "And I don't care what people think about me. I'm not asking anybody's help. I never have asked anybody's help. I don't want it. I don't need it."

"What were you crying about?" he demanded.

"Crying? Because I'm all in. You fainted, didn't you?"

Teddy Armbister looked at her a moment longer. Then he gave utterance to a long sigh. Then he nodded his head wearily.

"All right," he surrendered. "If that's the way you feel about it, I won't bother you any more. I'm not used to living in places like this, and it's hard to understand a girl as pretty as you are—I mean, as smart as you are, wanting to be all alone all the time. I don't see why we can't be friends. After all, the two of us are down here all alone, surrounded by nobody much but crackers, and I should think we could go ahead and be friends."

Georgia Woodstock started to speak. At least her eyes became suddenly expressive and her lips twitched; but she stayed silent and let him go on.

"I've got a nice roadster and a good, sound motor boat. We could have a lot of fun, just the two of us, cruising around and going over to the beach Sundays and taking in a dance now and then to offset some of the loneliness."

"I don't get lonely," she stated.

"Never?"

"I've never been lonely in my life!"

Teddy shook his head with perplexity. He managed a faint, weary smile.

"I don't see any sense in trying to sell friendship when the only customer I'm interested in doesn't want the commodity. Will you go to the beach with me Sunday?"

"No," said Georgia Woodstock.

"Will you go into Miami to-morrow night for dinner?"

"I'm sorry," said the stubbornest girl in the world.

She moved toward the tree where her white mule had been tethered all night long. But she turned back, placed her grimy hands on her hips and looked at Teddy, and there was no hostility visible.

"I suppose," she said, in her husky voice and in something closer to a friendly manner than she had ever before employed with him, "that my attitude seems funny—queer to anybody who has lived most of his life in a city, as you have. I think you're terribly conceited to take so much for granted. Why should I want to go swimming and dining and dancing with you, anyhow? But I haven't any personal objection to you. I don't think you could understand me if you tried. Whenever you get lonesome, you've always been accustomed to rushing out and buying some kind of entertainment.

"Well," she went on, "I've lived in this lonesome place so long that I'm beyond getting used to it. I'm not like you. I'm not the least bit afraid of the dark—loneliness. I like it. I'm entirely self-contained. I'm capable of amusing myself forever. I work so hard all day that there's hardly any time left for entertaining myself, and I'm jealous of every second of that."

"I see," murmured Teddy, who didn't see at all.

"And if I were looking for friends," went on this strange, candid girl, "I would not choose one who was as young and good looking as you are, because I know just what would eventually happen."

"Nothing would happen," the young man insisted.

"It would start off on a nice, friendly basis," said the girl. "And the first thing,

one or the other or both of us would fall in love, and everything would be balled up."

"I should think," Teddy put in, in the voice of one addressing, let us say, a school-teacher he was particularly anxious to please or placate, "that that would make everything pretty nice. After all, falling in love isn't a crime. People have been getting away with it for centuries without being arrested. I can't think of anything pleasanter than being in love with you. Of course, I am in love with you, whether you want me to be or not."

He paused, but she didn't break in. She looked at him gravely.

"I've played around with girls all my life," he proceeded, growing bolder, "and I've never seen a girl with so much spunk and so many other of the qualities that I can admire and respect. I would marry you in a minute, if you would have me."

That seemed to be everything he had to say.

"Falling in love," observed Miss Woodstock, "means nothing in the world to me but falling into trouble. I saw enough of that with my mother and father. Every minute of their married life was a cat-and-dog fight. I don't believe in marriage. At least, I don't see it for myself. And I think love is nothing but a trick that nature plays on people—a dirty, low-down, contemptible trick."

"I suppose you are right," Teddy agreed, listlessly.

He watched her swing herself aboard Rabbit. The mule moved slowly down the lane. Teddy walked along beside its head. He was thinking hard; he couldn't let her slip out of his life like this.

"A low-down, contemptible trick," repeated Georgia Woodstock, evidently fired by her idea. "You fall in love, and everything becomes rosy and beautiful and—possible. You forget your faults and your weaknesses and your burdens. You forget everything but each other. Everything is just wonderful. You can conquer anything. And that state of affairs keeps up until after you're married—I don't know how long after. Probably until the first baby.

"Then you gradually, or maybe sudden-

ly, realize that your faults and your weaknesses and your burdens are just the same as they were before you forgot them. And you keep on having babies."

"Everybody doesn't," Teddy objected.

"I'm talking about the average case," said the girl on the mule. "The babies come along, and first thing you know you're up to your ears in mumps and measles and whooping cough, and getting them ready for school. The burden gets heavier instead of lighter. Children cost a lot of money. And by and by they're old enough to go out into the world for themselves, and then you stop and take stock, and you find that you're old and tired and poorer than ever.

"It's been nothing but a trick. For some mysterious reason, the world has to be populated, and Nature tricks you into doing it. If love lasted, it might be better. But love doesn't last. And then you find that you're married to a person you detest and can't get away from, and you go through life hating and wanting to get away, but you can't."

"Well," said Teddy, thoughtfully, "if you'd turn that picture over you'd find that the other side wasn't quite so disagreeable. I know dozens of couples who've been married years and years and are still crazy about each other. And they don't look on their children as terrible burdens, either. Kids are a lot of fun. I'd like to have fifteen or twenty of 'em."

The rebel on the mule shuddered slightly.

"You will find plenty of girls around here to coöperate with you," was her comment. She gave the mule a kick, and it started off at a jog-trot.

"But look here," Teddy said, eagerly, trotting along beside her; and she looked down at him, not unkindly.

"Can't I come over some evening, Miss Woodstock, just to discuss things? You know—the news and crops and so on?"

"I have a new watchdog," said the beautiful misanthrope; "a trained police dog. He isn't afraid of ponderosa lemons, and besides, the lemon tree is empty."

"You mean," he said, bitterly, "you don't want to see me any more—ever?"

"Incredible as it may seem to you, Mr. Armbister, I don't."

"You're going to go right on," he panted, "living all alone like this until—until—"

She nodded briskly.

"It seems hard for you to swallow that I don't want and don't need any one to lean on for mental or any other kind of entertainment, but it's so. Can you tell me as many of the things I want to know, for example, as Voltaire and Kipling and Emerson and Carlyle?"

"We might read together," he suggested.

"But we won't," said Georgia.

"Some day," growled Teddy Armbrister, "you're going to need me—you're going to have to have me!"

She looked down at him with dancing eyes.

"I'll let you know," she said brightly, "when that day comes."

X.

It was as if Georgia Michigan Woodstock, seated wearily on her mule, was the last of a long procession. There had been, he reflected, so many of them; tall ones and short ones, blond ones and brunette ones; girls with brown eyes and blue eyes and green eyes and golden eyes; girls who were serious and demure, girls who sparkled like champagne; girls who flirted and girls who didn't. So many of them had there been that Teddy could not, if he tried, remember all of their names.

They had all been, he was very sure now, so many birds of passage; they had been as transitory as so many hothouse roses—not even a memory of their fragrance remained. They were phantoms, wisps of the easily forgotten past. Georgia Michigan Woodstock was real; she was vital—and absolutely essential to him.

Without her, he was certain, he would suffer as few men had ever suffered. He was fired with adoration for her. Never had there been such a girl as Georgia Michigan Woodstock! So beautiful! So clever! So brave! So wholly desirable!

It had been thoughtful of her to pause long enough to give him something more than a glimpse of the girl inside. But it only made him the more determined to possess her.

No girl alive had ever treated Teddy Armbrister so shabbily. As far back as he could remember, they had been grateful for his slightest consideration. They had quarreled over him. They had pursued and hounded him. Georgia Woodstock alone had treated him disdainfully.

He loved her and his egotism would permit him to accept no reason why she shouldn't permit him to tell her so at great length and at every opportunity. What was life for, anyhow?

She was, he presently concluded, all wrong. It was wrong to bottle yourself up; not to give any of yourself to anybody.

The world—Teddy argued passionately to himself—was organized on the basis of people communing; sharing each other's troubles and happiness; people loving and doing things for each other. No man or woman had ever been born so complete that he or she could ignore the world.

Teddy wished he had thought of telling her some of these things. They struck him as being pretty good.

She hadn't, he had gathered, so far needed anybody. That meant that she had had, all of her life, lucky breaks, when you looked at it that way.

No crisis had so far arisen that she had been unable to surmount unhelped. But one of these days, by the very law of averages, a crisis must arise that she could not meet alone.

And Teddy Armbrister was going to be on hand when it happened.

Forbidden to see her, he took the sensible alternative of expressing his passion in terms of work. He fell into the habit of getting up at dawn, of driving himself all day long, and studying horticulture until, as frequently happened, he would fall asleep in his chair.

He grew thin, and he did a great deal of brooding. He had never been in love before—every hour of every passing day he realized this more keenly. And he'd never love again.

This deep and noble sentiment that he entertained for Georgia Michigan Woodstock was ultimate—a love affair engineered in heaven. It was no longer a matter of wounded pride with Teddy. It was as if he

were the half of an electric circuit, needing her to be complete.

Teddy Armbuster's sprightliness gave way before a gravity hardly befitting his years. Moreover, life on a Florida farm did something to one's character. You could laugh things off in a city; you couldn't laugh them off on a farm.

But the farm repaid him for the seriousness with which he took it. His groves bloomed and promised bumper crops. His tomatoes and yams, in spite of the vandalism of the Woodstock hogs, ripened and were shipped to a clamoring Northern market.

Teddy's first check from a New York commission house gave him a new kind of thrill. It was fatter than he had expected; it proved in black and white that he was making good and it gave him an inkling of the handsome returns which might be yielded by the farm when he expanded it; bought in more land as he presently intended to do.

He was going to make mistakes, but in the long run he was going to make a good income. Without realizing it, he himself was putting down roots. And he was forcing himself as he had never permitted himself to be forced in New York.

He was doing, actually, two or three men's work, driven by a necessity, of which he was quite blind, to make good, to make himself rich and powerful.

The coming of the long, white summer—days of smooth glare, when not only sun and sky, but every tree and fencepost seemed to give off steady white light—found him working away with undiminished enthusiasm. When there was nothing to do in the grove or the fields, he fell to upon the house and the outbuildings.

There were screens to make and put in, floors to be oiled, plumbing to be repaired and finished—a thousand and one odd jobs that kept him busy with hammer and plane and paint brush from dawn until dusk. He wanted his house to be spick and span and perfect. It was of golden stone—coquina—and built to endure, with a roof of dull red tile that was impervious alike to suns and rains.

He found a small deposit of ojus rock on a hillock in one of his uncleared fields.

With the tractor he hauled loads of the crumbling buff stone to his driveway; finished grading and crowning it.

Teddy had vague ambitions of making his estate a showplace. One of these days, he was going to build his own packing house, and in time he would have a canning plant down on the river. He sounded the channel down the Ooglagoochee as far as Biscayne Bay; found there was enough water at high tide to accommodate a practicable barge.

He grew accustomed to a great many strange and unaccustomed things; to the land crabs; to the horizontal fury of the rains; to the unvarying temperature, to the long days of silky glare. But he was growing to love it all, too. Nowhere in the world could be found such nights, so still, so purple, so fragrant, so star-spangled.

Teddy became interested, in an amateurish way, in the stars. And we find him, as summer drew to its close, accepting for the first time in his life, humility.

He had come to Florida cocksure and aglow with egotism. He had owned the universe. Women had spoiled him—until he met Georgia Michigan Woodstock.

He saw very little of that stubborn and self-contained young woman that summer. Now and then he encountered her along the road or on the beach, but he detected no change in her attitude, certainly no encouragement. She was pleasant, distant, remote—always cool, tormentingly beautiful and wonderfully self-possessed.

He heard one day from the lips of Bill Pocock the dismaying rumor that the Woodstock girl was planning to sell her place and move away. For the first time in their acquaintance, Teddy telephoned her.

Georgia verified the rumor.

"I'm going to put the place on the market," she told him, with her habitual briskness, "as soon as the tourist season starts."

"Where are you going?" he managed to ask.

She hadn't, she said, made up her mind.

"Why are you going?" he bluntly demanded.

"I want to see something of the world."

He wanted to ask her, bitterly, if she had grown tired of her precious isolation, but

that would have raised too sore a subject. He contented himself with:

"It's a bad time to sell, isn't it? Prices are still at the bottom and people are still scared of real estate down here."

"I'm willing to take a loss," said the firm young voice. "If you're in the market, maybe we can talk business. I'm only asking thirty thousand."

"I'll think it over," Teddy promised.

He hung up the receiver feeling sick all over. With Georgia Woodstock gone, it suddenly occurred to him that he didn't want to stay in Florida.

He knew that he had been kidding himself. He hadn't been fixing his place up because he wanted a showplace; he hadn't been dreaming of his own packing houses and his own canning plant because he was so uniquely ambitious; he had simply wanted to prove to Georgia Woodstock that he could make good; had been driven by the goad which has egged men on to achievement since time immemorial—an attempt to please some woman!

It would be a wrench to give up this fine farm and the future he had planned for it, but if Georgia was going away, he was going away, too. He'd put his place on the market and go back to New York.

He didn't want to go back to New York and its noise and dirt and aimless hurry, but he'd go anyway. No object in staying down here any longer, to grow rich and old and sour.

He would go on October 1. He would simply place his property in the hands of a good agent, go north and get a job. What a damned fool he had been ever to dream of happiness with a girl as selfish and cold as Georgia Michigan Woodstock!

He would, he knew with certainty, never look at another woman with anything but contempt. That night when she had got him out of bed to fight the freeze had spoiled him for other women. If they could only have gone on, in the natural way, from there!

To think that he had been fatuous enough to suppose that a crisis could ever arise in which he could help her!

But a few mornings later, hours before sunup, the opportunity for which he had

been so hopefully, so fatuously waiting, arrived. And it was a blessing thoroughly disguised.

Teddy Armbrister was startled out of deep sleep by a long scream half-animal, half-human—a scream of torture beyond endurance; such a scream as earliest man might have listened to—and buried his face in leaves to escape!

XI.

It brought Teddy to a sitting position in bed with ears straining, eyes staring.

His first impression was that, somewhere near at hand, a fire siren was shrieking; but common sense promptly rejected this: there weren't any fire sirens in this neighborhood to shriek. His next and more nearly correct impression was that the world had gone howling mad.

The house was shaking under blasts of a wind mightier than he had ever known. A weird saffron glow seemed to emanate from the sky. A deep thundering was rising to equal the intensity of the wind's persistent scream, and this deep, approaching note he knew must be rain.

Some heavy object banged against the side of the house as he started out of the room. Somewhere downstairs, a door banged with the explosive violence of a bomb going off. He was positive that the very floor rose and fell under the ballooning force of one blast.

He hastened downstairs with a flash light in his hand, and as he reached the lower floor rain struck the northwest wall of the house in a thudding, annihilating impact. Water, a cataract of it, came surging in over the sill of the breakfast porch.

He had left the glass doors open. Now he attempted to close them. He could close them part way, when the force of wind and flying water struck at him with the weight of cold flowing metal.

He tried closing one door at a time. Rain in great clots slapped his face and dripping body with the force of flying shot. But he succeeded in forcing the first door shut against that solid blast; he made fast the catches at top and bottom and then addressed himself to the other door.

His feet were inches deep in streaming,

cold black water. Branches, twigs, rubbish flew against his legs and body. Then it occurred to him that this wind was flying through the house as if it were a black tunnel.

Teddy raced up the stairs and closed windows. He returned to the living room and again pitted his strength against the remaining glass door.

A momentary lull came. He forced the door shut. Then the wind screamed again. Three panes of glass burst out and flew across the room, to smash and shatter on the opposite wall.

He dragged a davenport and a table across the floor and barricaded the door. On this barricade he threw rugs and books, magazines, book-ends—every object of any weight his fumbling hands came upon.

A fury mounted in him, as the pitch of the annihilating scream went up and up. He knew now that he was fighting a hurricane that would, if it blew much longer, lay flat every tree in his grove; flood his land, destroy his road—wipe out, in a few short hours, his work of the entire spring and summer.

He could hear things rattling through the air, driven by that furious wind. A log, several feet long and at the least eight inches through, bounded through a window as if it had been pitched by the hand of a giant. Branches from heaven only knew what distance were thumping against the northwest wall of the house, thudding down on the roof.

The log had come through the window end first, destroying three panes, through which water was streaming. Into the opening he stuffed a couch cover wadded into a bundle with newspapers. Then he dashed upstairs for a look around.

Several windows had been broken, and water was streaming in through them. The floor upstairs was almost ankle deep, and the stairs had become a noisy rapids.

He longed for but dreaded the coming of light, knowing that it would show him nothing but devastation; trees flat on the ground; garage and barn gone.

The greasy saffron light grew brighter. Objects became more and more visible. He would be thankful, he knew, if his house

alone stood. When the yellowish light increased sufficiently for him to distinguish between shadows and solid objects, he went to a window and looked out toward his grove.

But he couldn't make sure whether that tangle consisted of trees down or standing. His dock was gone. The Captain Kiddo was nowhere to be seen.

Then he discovered that his yard was full of churning yellow water. The wind had backed up the water in the river until it had overflowed its banks. Perhaps his pier was under water.

He saw that the barn was turned over on one side. The garage had vanished. His roadster stood wheel deep in water.

Teddy went into the kitchen and, after a dozen vain attempts, lighted his kerosene stove. He made himself coffee, boiled some eggs and had breakfast.

He was finishing when the scream of the wind abruptly changed to a moan, which, as suddenly, ceased.

So unexpectedly had the terrific medley of noises stopped that he would not believe for a time that the strangeness his ears were being attuned to was silence. A silence disturbed only by the dripping and gurgling of water.

But it was not, he was certain, the silence of a storm blown out. There was in this silence a quality as sinister, as menacing as the oily saffron glow that still filled the world.

It was a silence containing neither peace nor reassurance. It was an ugly, threatening silence.

Its effect upon Teddy Armbister was to make him move about on tiptoe, as if he were treading upon a world composed of dynamite, which might blow up at the slightest jar.

He had been worrying about Georgia, consciously and unconsciously, ever since that first scream of the wind had aroused him. Her house was on lower land than his, and it was built of wood. He would, he decided, reassure himself by telephoning.

Teddy lifted the receiver and heard only the emptiness of a dead line. Doubtless, the wires were down.

He supposed she was safe. Wasn't she

the kind of a girl that nothing ever happened to? Presumably, she was snug in her house, preparing to repair the damage the storm had done, and quite unperturbed.

She was, he thought, a solid rock against which the worst of hurricanes would howl in vain. That kind of girl did not know what defeat was; would always rise above it.

And even while he reasoned thus, his common sense told him that no girl alive could successfully pit her stubbornness against such unleashed forces. Here, perhaps, was the opportunity to help her which he had been longing for.

The continued menace of the sky and the uneasy silence hurried him. He slipped into his clothes; put on his hip boots and waded out into the yard.

Lodged against the stone foundation of the packing shed, whose superstructure was obliterated, he found the Captain Kiddo. She was floating in water where last night green turf had grown; scratched, but sound and seaworthy.

Teddy dragged himself over the coaming into the cockpit, which was fortunately of the self-bailing type, and unhooked the door into the cabin. There were several inches of water on the cabin floor, but this he could get rid of with the bilge pump attached to the engine—if he could start the engine.

Some ominous quality in the silence drove him to that task in a nervous panic. The self-starter was jammed; probably it was under water and short circuited. So he cranked the engine by hand. Gratitude for its thoughtful builder glowed in him as the exhaust sputtered and settled down to a smooth purring.

Teddy Armbister looked up at the skidding, greasy clouds and threw in the clutch. The clouds were whirling and veering. There were tons of wind up there still.

He had never been in a circular storm before, but he guessed, with fair accuracy, that the lull meant only that the storm center had moved to this area and that more—and worse—was coming, probably from another quarter.

He steered the Captain Kiddo out across the pond that had been his yard and into

the swollen river. All the familiar scenery was changed by the hurricane and the high water.

He passed a giant alligator headed resolutely upstream. He passed at least a dozen dead hogs. That meant that Georgia's land was immersed under so much water that there was no foothold for her pigs.

The river was filled with rubbish; planks, sides of barns, limbs of trees, whole trees. It meant careful navigation—he must not permit the Captain Kiddo's propeller to become fouled.

His hands on the wheel were shaking. His eyes, as far as they reached, saw only desolation, greasy, yellow water, greasy yellow sky, a world wet and yellow and ugly. He might have been the last man alive in a world completely destroyed.

There was some kind of electric tension in the air which plucked at his nerves; made him shiver and want to hide—and there was no place in the world to hide.

The sense of an awful, complete destruction was so vivid that he was prepared, when he emerged from the last tangle of wreckage and trees that should have brought him in sight of Georgia's home, to find himself confronted by nothing but foaming yellow water and a jackstraw heap of planks where her house had stood.

A faint, warning sound was issuing from the sky again—a whisper from the returning destroyer.

Where was the girl whom nothing could vanquish?

The outlines of her dwelling were retained in a crazy caricature. Somewhere in that wreckage was Georgia Woodstock. He shouted her name and nosed the Captain Kiddo in close until it grounded on some object underwater.

There was no answer, and the note of the returning storm came as a rising sigh. It was raining again—drizzling, as it had been by fits and starts since the silence began.

"Georgia!"

He jumped out on a pile of sloping planks and made his way precariously to a flat, shingled surface that had once been a slanting roof.

Teddy found a shoe and almost cried aloud.

The sigh of the coming wind became a moan. A torrent of rain fell.

"Georgia!"

Somewhere in this tangled wreckage he would find her. She would, he was certain, be alive. He couldn't shake himself of the feeling, the belief, that she had driven into him—that she was indestructible.

The first blast of the wind came screaming through the rain.

And suddenly, protruding from under a plank, he saw a hand—a white hand, limp. A tiny trickle of blood ran from one dejected finger tip.

Teddy fell with fury at the planks which pinioned her down. He called her name repeatedly. He worked frantically. And the screaming of the wind went up and up.

It appeared that she was somehow tangled up in a thick rug—all but wrapped up in it. The rug he seized by one corner. He jerked and pulled. If she were alive, that rug had probably saved her.

Just then it did not occur to him to wonder whether she was alive or not. A woman unconscious had always terrified him beyond any kind of rational thought. He knew only that he must free her before the rising wind piled the water up deeper; must get her aboard the motor boat and somehow manage to convey her to safety.

She was dressed in a gray flannel shirt and overalls, and she was soaked to the skin.

How Teddy freed her he would never know. But presently he had moved the last plank which held her down and was staggering over the flat shingled surface through a blinding, horizontal rain toward the Captain Kiddo.

He carried her into the cabin, and was promptly assailed by the necessity of doing two things at once: to try all measures that might restore life to her, and to get the boat out of this dangerous open space.

Teddy compromised by placing her in one of the bunks and pouring whisky into her mouth, then hastening to the wheel and getting the Captain Kiddo under way.

The wind seemed fairly to lift her out of the water. Teddy put the wheel hard

over and ran with it. The hurricane was building up in the southeast. It would blow him approximately where he wanted to go—inland—away from the danger of whirlpools and bobbing tree trunks.

A rowboat, bottom up, with bows stove in, floated past.

Wind and rain flattened him against the wheel, all but drove the breath out of his lungs. Presently he was actually fighting for air.

Later he would learn, with some gratification, that the wind gauge in Miami had broken when it indicated one hundred and thirty-five miles an hour.

The world—this was all he could grasp at present—had gone howling mad again; the wind, from the sound of it, was blowing harder than it had blown through the night. He was aware of this and he was aware that he must somehow bring the Captain Kiddo into some haven of safety.

Then Teddy grew deeply concerned over the feeling of faintness that was creeping over him, that and a swimming blackness that came not from the shrieking wind and rain, but from within himself. It did not matter that he had withstood enough punishment already to have worn out two or three normal men. He knew only that he must hang on; must not collapse.

He felt dizzy and sick and weak, and his hands clutching the wheel were cold and numb and exhausted.

He skirted trees that were lashing about dangerously. The shrieking of the hurricane seemed to diminish, but he knew that this was that rising weakness within himself, shutting off his sensations.

His last impressions were blurred, as if his ears were affected and his eyes had lost their knack of focusing. Consciousness had become dim and remote.

Teddy slipped off from it in a state that was partly the sleep of utter exhaustion and partly a resignation on the part of a human mechanism that could endure no more of this screaming terror.

XII.

SUNLIGHT streamed into his face and the blissful silence of a world once more at

peace, once more delivered from the yellow, shrieking horror, greeted him.

Every muscle, every joint, every fiber of every tissue ached and throbbed.

He was lying on his back on the built-in bench in the cockpit. He turned his head, and his aching eyes, useful once more, rested on the drawn white face of Georgia Woodstock.

He sat up and stared at her, groaning as he did so. She was sitting on the opposite side, looking at him curiously. She spoke in a dead voice.

"I let you sleep it out."

Teddy croaked. "How are you?"

And she answered, as dully: "All right. I think I have a sprained ankle. My house seemed to fall into pieces. Have you any idea where we are?"

Teddy shook his head.

"I turned off the engine," she added.

"That's good," said Teddy, gravely.

"I suppose," she went on, listlessly, "my house is in ruins."

"Yes," he agreed, "everything is in ruins. The last time I looked there wasn't anything standing. I'll start the motor and we'll see what we can see."

Georgia said nothing to that. She sat, with one hand holding up her head, looking dully across the water.

Teddy started the motor and found a bearing in the shape of a distant roof. It was the Arcadia grocery store. The Captain Kiddo was inland perhaps a quarter of a mile from the river.

Her keel struck ground before she had gone a hundred feet. The flood water was receding. It gurgled past upturn trees, it gurgled under the stern. Before much time passed, the Captain Kiddo was going to be high and dry—marooned.

"We seem to be stuck," said Teddy.

"We can wade," suggested the woebe-gone girl.

Teddy threw the engine into reverse, and the boat moved. He headed her again toward the thinnest of the tangle, and presently they were riding on buff water.

His house, he saw as they passed, was still standing, apparently uninjured except for many broken window panes. Water had receded from his roadster; it was only hub-

deep now. The grove was, or appeared to be at this distance, wiped out.

Georgia was staring straight ahead, down the river. She didn't resemble a bully now. She looked crushed and defeated.

"You needn't go any farther," she said presently.

They had reached the last bend, and it was hard to realize that a house had once stood here, that a grove of handsome fruit trees had surrounded it. In their place was knee-deep swamp.

The water, to be sure, would recede; but of the house little would remain but foundation posts. The trees were gone. The outbuildings were gone. The hurricane had, in so few hours, wiped out the labor and devotion of many years!

Teddy Armbrister wanted to express his sympathy, but words were so inadequate.

"Let's go back," she said.

He didn't answer. Back where? Her home was gone and she had never had another. He was sorrier for Georgia Woodstock than he had ever been in the days when she had so arrogantly defied the world. The girl who could not be vanquished was crushed—ruined.

Teddy steered the faithful Captain Kiddo into the mud of his back yard. An oriole from God knew where had found a place to perch—the very roofpeak of his house, and the still, golden morning was suddenly filled with golden song.

The bird seemed to be terrifically glad that the hurricane was over. His warble was like a sudden release from madness.

Teddy had climbed down into water up to his knees, and Georgia was preparing to follow. He had his hands lifted up to help her down, and he was watching her with dark concern.

So far, since he had come back to life with the sun in his face and peace in the golden air, her face had not been enlivened by the passage of a single emotion.

It was the claylike lifelessness of one who had been struck down and trampled upon until the last despairing struggle of the spirit was stunned.

Her eyes were large, round and possessed of a childlike wonder. The ends of her mouth were depressed. She reminded

Teddy of a sad little ghost. The bully of Biscayne Bay was whipped and humbled.

He saw, as she started almost blindly toward his extended hands, that her chin was trembling. This symptom, as he assured himself, was good.

Let her uncork herself. Hysterics were unpleasant, distressing, but they would turn that dullness into life.

But he was totally unprepared for what she did next. She sobbed once as she lowered herself over the side; then, as if blindly, she felt about with groping hands for him, and when she found him, she settled into his arms and clung to him.

Teddy Armbrister had been waiting for this, or its equivalent in word or deed, for how long? But he experienced no gratification now. He had a crushed, broken girl in his arms and he acted accordingly.

He gathered her up and waded through the water to the house. He kicked open the door and went in.

Once, ages ago, he had dreamed of this—picking her up lightly and carrying her over the threshold into his home—their home. He had worked hard so that that moment would be as charming as possible. He would carry her into a home appealing and delightful.

A sour smell of soggy things was already in the air. A great deal of good furniture was ruined. Everything his gaze lighted upon seemed, in fact, to be ruined.

He placed Georgia Woodstock on her feet, and released her. But she didn't release him. She hung on.

Teddy patted her gently on the back, after the immemorial manner of awkward man attempting to soothe distraught girl.

"There, there," he said, idiotically.

She clung more tightly. Her sobbing had ceased. She only held him fiercely, as if she would never let him go.

"I wish I could say something," Teddy murmured. "You know how I feel. You know there's nothing under the sun I won't do to help you fix things up as they were before."

A muffled voice from his chest said: "I don't want things fixed up the way they were before."

"I know," said Teddy miserably. "It's

just ruined your plans. It's going to knock a lot off the price, with the house and trees gone, but when this water drains off, things aren't going to look so bad. Everything looks its worst now."

There was no verbal response to that. Her arms about his neck tightened convulsively.

"What was the use," she wanted to know, "of trying to get away?"

Teddy didn't know anything about that. It didn't seem to make sense, so he kept silent.

"I knew I couldn't get away," said the rebel, "from you."

"From me?" gasped the young man.

Some of the mislaid fire which could, at times, flame so fiercely in Georgia Woodstock, made an appearance now.

"You know very well I was going to sell my place to get away from you!"

Teddy had been through too much to believe in miracles.

"You're hysterical," he said rudely.

He tried to free himself, but she only clung tighter.

"You know very well I've been in love with you from the very beginning!"

Teddy made an even more determined effort to free himself from the clasp of those slim but muscular arms, but with no more success than before.

"I suppose," Georgia panted, "that you want me to throw myself at your feet!"

"I want you," Teddy retorted, bluffly, "to stop being silly. You aren't kidding me for a minute. You—you're beside yourself. You've been through hell and you don't know what you're talking about. You're going to stop this babbling—"

"Teddy," the girl interrupted him, firmly. "I do know what I'm talking about. I love you."

"You've been through a hurricane," the young man went on. "You've lost your home and your hogs; you've seen the work of years swept away before your eyes in a single day and night—"

"I know all about that," the stubborn girl again broke in. "And I am telling you I have been a fool to act the way I did—when I loved you all along."

"You don't love me," said Teddy.

"I do love you," declared Georgia, still holding him tight.

"You're licked," he cried. "You're just giving in! Wait a week! Wait until tomorrow!"

"It isn't necessary to wait a single second," persisted the girl. "I'm not licked. I'm not giving in. Do you know why I cried the morning you fainted with your head in my lap? Because I hated myself for loving you!"

"It doesn't make sense," groaned Teddy Armbrister. "You've treated me like dirt! You couldn't have loved me and kept me so miserable! You—you said love is nothing but a low-down, contemptible trick that Nature plays on people."

"Nature plays lots of dirty tricks on people, Teddy. Look at the hurricane! We weathered that, and if we weathered that, we can weather anything. Teddy, if we love each other, nothing is impossible. We'll pitch right in. We'll work like the

devil. We'll have the most beautiful place in Florida!"

Teddy shook himself. Somehow, this did not sound like the babbling of hysteria. Unless he was badly mistaken, Georgia's feet were on the ground; had probably never left the ground, except for a few excusable hours when she lay unconscious in the wreckage of her house and in the bunk on the Captain Kiddo.

He shook himself and folded his arms about her and looked down blissfully into her upturned face. It was no longer white and drawn. It no longer lacked emotion. Pink and radiant—it was flooded with emotion!

Teddy experienced a dizzying sense of release. He seemed suddenly to be filled with a superhuman power. Thinking back over the black hours of the most recent past as he dropped his head to kiss her, he had a feeling of almost fatherly affection for the hurricane.

THE END

The greatest news story in history—Washington's return to life—is described in "The Return of George Washington," starting October 15th.



INDIAN SUMMER

SHADY isles of birch and willow,
Soft gray mosses for my pillow;
Song of crickets and a smiling
Harvest moon my dreams beguiling;
Oh, it's good to slip the tether
When it's Indian Summer weather.

Distant low of restless cattle,
Leaves that stir and boughs that rattle,
Fleecy clouds the blue empearling,
Smoke wreaths in the distance curling,
Joy and peace make camp together
When it's Indian Summer weather.

There's a time for fame pursuing,
Time for play and time for wooing,
There's for everything a season
And rebellion would be treason.
Woods and glades and copse and heather,
These for Indian Summer weather.

L. Mitchell Thornton.



King's Khaki

By WILL McMORROW

Author of "*Thundering Dawns*," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

LOSING his job and his girl at the same time, Dick Harmon drowned his woes at an East Side, New York, saloon, and awoke the next morning to find he had been shanghaied on a horse boat bound for Liverpool. It was in 1915, and the animals were being taken across for the Allies. During the trip Harmon succeeded in rehardening his muscles, and making a friend of Bob Tuesday, who called himself a soldier of misfortune. They arrived in London, and, their finances exhausted, joined the British army. They were assigned to the old and famous London Light Infantry Guard, and sent to the training camp at Camberham, where a rigorous discipline was practiced, which would either make a first class soldier of a recruit, or kill him. Being Americans, their first day under Sergeant Narley did not begin auspiciously, and he insisted on calling Harmon "Canadian."

CHAPTER XI.

SOLDIERS OF THE KING.

HARMON had had as a boy a few months' instruction in military drill at a juvenile summer camp, and Bob Tuesday had picked up, in his short and inglorious career as a South American colonel, the rudiments of the school of the soldier. But they found it of little practical use on their first morning of drill at Camberham.

They discovered that the British com-

mand of "Right turn," "Left turn," and "About turn" meant not only the American "Right face," "Left face," and "About face," but, executed on the march, was also the American "By the right flank," "By the left flank," and "To the rear—march."

The forming of column of squads from line, instead of being a simple "Squads right," became a long-winded command, "Move to the right in fours—form fours—right" and was carried out in an altogether different fashion. "Column right" was

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 24.

"Right wheel" and "Forward, march" at Camberham was known as "Quick, march." Even the manner of saluting was different, the English method being to carry the hand to the forehead, palm forward.

"Gawd blimy!" Corporal Robinson protested. "Are you chaps 'olding your fingers to your noses at me? Nah, then, again! Right 'and salute! Left 'and salute! Now, let's see you put a little snap in it on the march. Quick, march! Right—left—right—left! Keep that step—you don't need a bloomin' brass band to 'elp you! Don't let Sergeant Narley see you or he'll wake you up—"

But Sergeant Narley, even in the midst of two thousand men all drilling at once, could pick out the laggards. He appeared suddenly at the corporal's elbow, a swagger stick of bamboo pointing at the awkward squad.

"Little doublin' is what they need," he snarled. "I'll take 'em, corporal, for a few minutes an' smarten them up."

His plan of smartening was simple, consisting of keeping the squad at double time for most of the drill period. Running, even at the trotting military pace, is hot work on a warm day on a shadowless, baking parade ground. Narley stood on one spot, turning slowly around like a ring master at a circus and snapped his verbal whip frequently over the heads of the puffing recruits.

"About turn! Lift your feet around! About turn! About turn! You'll be dizzier before you're through—left—right—left—right—move your feet—catch up with the rest, that man—you're in the army now, not pickin' rags—wake up that Ruffit—ruffian—about turn—are you on our side, Canadian—if you are turn with the rest—none of your tricks—"

The "Canadian" was having a hard time. Clouds of choking, yellow dust rose from the gravel under the scuffling feet of the squad, caking on the perspiration that drenched his face. But the rest were no better off. They stumbled along, bumping into one another on the turns, scrambling to catch up with the others, panting, gasping, heads hanging like men at the end of a long race.

The sharp voice of Sergeant Narley, menacing and monotonous as the rattle of a machine gun, followed them up and down, around and around, minute after minute, penetrating through the shuffle of feet, throbbing of temples and the noise from the other squads.

"About turn! Sharp, now! Gawd 'elp the regiment with the like of you to depend on. You're like a bunch of wild cattle! Step out in front, damn your lazy 'earts! *Get back in line, that man!* Left turn! Right turn! About turn! *Stead-dy!* What's the matter with 'im—is he drunk? Halt!"

The line of men stood, swaying on their feet, breasts heaving, and watched the amiable and ungainly Ruffit, who had dropped like a man blackjacked under the feet of the squad. Tuesday started forward to aid him.

"Back there, you!" Narley snapped. "Another move out of 'you an' you'll be in the book for a pack drill. Here, you an' you! Take 'im off to the side an' throw some water on 'im."

His stick indicated Harmon and his neighbor. They lifted Ruffit between them and carried him off to the shade of a tree by the huts, and loosened the collar of his tunic and presently Ruffit's eyes blinked open.

"Feel better?" Harmon inquired anxiously.

"Kinda sickish, mate. It was fair 'ell for me. I ain't used to it."

The brigade sergeant-major, a magnificent and immaculate being in pipe-clayed belt, approached. He carried the royal coat of arms embroidered on his sleeve and a silver-headed stick beneath his arm, was suspected by the recruits of wearing stays to retain his wasplike waist, and was as stately and frozen and dignified as a Hindu god. His large mustache, suitable for a large man, was waxed into darning needle points six inches long.

"What's the trouble with this man?" he boomed.

"Felt a bit light in the 'ead, sir," said Ruffit. "Fell out—"

"Best go sick, my man," the brigade s.-m. said, not unkindly. "Let the medi-

cal officer look you over. Report at sick parade."

He started to turn away, looked at Harmon and stopped.

"Shave this morning?"

"Yes, sir," Recruit Harmon answered promptly.

"Stand to attention. That's better. Always remember that when you speak to a warrant officer. Your trained soldier should have warned you not to shave your upper lip. It's against the king's regulations. Remember that, too."

He strode away. Harmon felt his bare upper lip. He wondered how much of a mustache was demanded by the regulations—obviously, one could not grow a luxuriant plant like the brigade sergeant-major's in less than ten years.

"Go sick," scoffed Ruffit. "Not likely an' have the medical ofricer lookin' up my age. Turn me out, like as not, in a flash."

"Why, how old are you?" asked Harmon.

"I'm down at forty-eight, but I don't mind tellin' you I seen fifty-four last week. But I can fight for blurry old England as good as the next."

Harmon nodded silently and helped him to his feet. To the American the whole thing was an adventure—the maddest kind of a lark—but he sensed that it was sober earnest for old Ruffit. Harmon began to appreciate the caliber of the men of Kitchener's army—the quality of the raw material that was being welded in the furnace of Camberham barracks.

He hurried to rejoin the squad. A drummer—a sixteen-year-old youngster not much bigger than the emblazoned snare drum he carried—rolled his sticks vigorously near by and the squads were marshaled by the corporals and the ubiquitous sergeants into solid ranks opposite the tall flagpole.

An officer, smart and shining in boots and spurs, strode to the center of the square, facing the men. Behind him marched two soldiers with fixed bayonets, a third man, who was unarmed, walking between.

"Now, you chaps, pay attention," counseled Corporal Robinson, sotto-voce, "so it

won't 'appen to you. That's the adjutant, an' he's goin' to read a bloke's court-martial sentence."

"A-ten-shun!" the voice of the brigade sergeant-major echoed.

The ranks became rigid. The adjutant read from a blue paper in a hurried monotone, while a corporal standing behind the prisoner stepped up and snatched off the prisoner's cap.

It was a long-winded document, unintelligible to Harmon at that distance. Finished reading, the adjutant folded the paper, the prisoner was marched away and the parade dismissed.

"Desertion," Corporal Robinson informed Harmon on the way off the square. "Three years' penal servitude for six months' absence an' a dishonorable discharge. But the bloke will be out before we are at that."

"Kind of strict," Tuesday suggested.

"It was 'is own fault," the corporal spat disgustedly. "They don't bother you none if you enlist again in some other mob. Why, I've seen chaps come in 'ere with 'arf a uniform on from some other regiment where they went over the 'ill 'count of some bad feelings with the sergeants. So long as you join up with something they don't bother you. But if you wander about spare they'll pick you up. They can't wink their bloomin' eyes at everything a deserter does."

In the afternoon there was another drill, but, fortunately for number nine squad, without Narley. After that came a lecture on the history of the regiment, given by a second lieutenant, who appeared from nowhere and disappeared immediately afterward, and a talk on personal hygiene by a bored medical officer.

"Swabs outside! Tea is up!"

The tea-carrying details from the different squads raced to be first to the cook house door and came back heavily laden. After tea there was another spell of cleaning up, scrubbing equipment and fatigue duty outside the huts.

On the drill square forty or fifty men, carrying heavy packs and full marching equipment, tramped round and round in a haze of dust of their own raising, without

pause or rest. A corporal, carrying a swagger stick, led them on their interminable march and a grim sergeant-major, very erect in the center of the square, watched them to see that the step didn't lag.

"What's them guys drillin' for?" asked Tuesday, curiously.

The trained "sweat," speculatively counting some coppers preparatory to adjoining to the canteen, winked a watery eye.

"Pack drills. You'll learn more about them some day. They come easy an' they goes hard—two hours with a sixty-pound blurry pack an' a wet shirt on your back. Them's just 'defaulters'—blokes wot made a mistake at drill or forgot to clean their ears for inspection. They's worse punishments nor that 'anded out 'ere. Pack drills is nothin'—if you got a strong 'eart an' a good constitution. They 'elps to 'arden a chap for the war."

"Suppose you can't stand the gaff?" Harmon objected. "It isn't fair—"

"If you break down they put you on easy jobs—cleanin' sewers an' peelin' spuds in cook house an' the like. Unless you can work your ticket with the medical officer. I remember a chap—soft, easy-spoken chap 'e was, too—came in 'ere in peace time an' acted balmy.

"Every time 'e was on parade—colonel an' band an' all—this chap would jump outa line an' pick papers up from the ground. Said 'e couldn't bear to see papers blowed about. They couldn't break 'im of the 'abit. Clean off 'is perch, the medical officer sez, an' gives 'im 'is discharge ticket.

"When 'e passes out the gate the sergeant of the guard thinks to 'ave a bit of fun an' sez to him: 'There y'are, Whitey, you passed by a piece of paper.' Whitey only smiles kinda quiet an' shows him the discharge they give 'im. 'Pick it up yourself, sergeant,' he sez, 'and my compliments to the colonel. This is the only piece of paper I've been lookin' for.'"

"An' he was no more balmy than I am, s'help me," he concluded. "But don't you go tryin' to work your ticket that way. They've fluffed to that game. Now, you lads, get ready and soap the insides of your socks to save your feet. You've got a bit

of a route march to-morrow—twenty blurry miles or so."

CHAPTER XII.

CONCERNING BUMBLE AND BUCK.

SO, day by day, the hardening process went on.

Harmon learned to stand the heat and hardship of the drill ground, learned to obey promptly, to keep his mouth shut tightly and his eyes to the front, learned the art of handling the old-fashioned Lee-Metford rifle, with which recruits were equipped, learned to stand guard at the barrack gate in driving rain or through chilly nights without taking refuge in the sentry box, learned to take his pack drills and punishments as part of the day's work, learned that a man can keep his self-respect in spite of the tongue lashings of drill sergeants and keep his mind and heart clean in spite of the drunkenness of the canteen and the blasphemy of the barracks.

One day was like another, and all spelled work and physical weariness at night and a dreamless sleep on the hard cot until the bugles blew on the square for reveille.

Squad drill, rifle drill, Swedish drill, parades, inspections, and lectures followed one another in endless routine. On Saturday mornings the recruits sweated with brush and bath brick and soap suds to make the floors and benches and tables of the hut snow-white for inspection. On Sunday mornings bugles sounded for church parade and every one lined up in his special religious group to be marched off by beat of drum to the chapel of his denomination.

Harmon, belonging to no particular sect, was entered as Church of England and filed in with the majority into the barrack chapel to attend the service conducted by the chaplain—irreverently known to the rank and file as "Creeping Jimmy." But, outside of that compulsory manifestation, religion did not bulk largely in the lives of the L. L. I.'s.

Tuesday, hoping to avoid church service, claimed to belong to a rare sect known as the "Straight Flushers," even going to the extent of singing a snatch of hymn to prove

it—until the sergeant-major told him to “shut his bloomin’ noise”—and was solemnly marched away in a parade of his own, by a corporal, all over the town of Camberham to find the proper chapel. After which Tuesday was paraded to the barrack church and later given two pack drills for his trouble by Sergeant Narley.

Once a week the recruits were marched to the bath house in squads, to revel in cleanliness, with two corporals with scrubbing brushes near by to catch the delinquents. Once the recruits were vaccinated and twice inoculated in the breast against dysentery.

But even a vaccination was a welcome relief from the strenuous activities of the drill square.

Sometimes the soldier factory appeared to Harmon as a huge, remorseless treadmill—an endless nightmare of plodding feet and menial tasks and shouting sergeants. And occasionally his mind was caught with the glamour—the romance of these thousands of men of all kinds and conditions, bullied and driven and sworn at, but refusing to desert, refusing to “work their tickets,” sticking to a distasteful job because of the spark that glowed within them.

Baffin, the Devonshire farmer lad, that slept beside Harmon, was like that; Walton, the glowering, taciturn coal miner from the north, even though he swore strange, gloomy oaths, and believed firmly in an Englishman’s inalienable right to beat his wife “with a stick no thicker than his thumb”; young Simpson, sixteen years old and claiming nineteen; and Tremanner, painter, philosopher, and gentleman from Cornwall.

Harmon found himself rather attracted by the quiet, handsome Cornishman, an attraction due in part to the fact that the latter spoke a more understandable brand of the king’s English than the cockneys and countrymen that abounded in the squad.

Tremanner did his work—and aided the unfortunate Ruffit, who was anathema to the sergeants—uncomplainingly, appearing to derive a philosophic amusement from a hectic world.

“A great game,” he informed Harmon, and waved his long, painter’s hand toward

the parade-ground where Sergeant Narley blasted a new squad of recruits.

“A great game this—turning gold and silver and lead and dross into—into gun-metal. And some of us think we’re precious metal in civil life, too—I’ve exhibited at the Royal Academy myself—but we’re all the same to Sergeant Narley, the coster’s son. Quite right, too, since we’re training for a game out there that can’t be played wrong twice. Mistakes are fatal there. When you get bowled out once you don’t get another chance at the wicket in the war game.”

“Still,” Harmon objected, “a fellow like this Narley, now, that drops his aspirates and was dragged up in a hut behind a canteen somewhere—”

“That same Narley,” Tremanner smiled understandingly, “gets under my skin sometimes, but he caught the Distinguished Conduct Medal—and deserved it, too—on the retreat from Antwerp. There are worse.

“A chap I know—son of a baronet—is serving in the ranks and his father’s butler holds a commission. Both doing their bit, you know, but the butler rather fancied being a temporary gentleman and the gentleman rather fancied being a temporary soldier and earning his spurs, so to speak.”

He puffed dreamily at his cigarette.

“Personally, I wouldn’t miss this for anything. My trade is with the brush and rank means nothing. I hope, after the war ends—twenty or thirty years from now by the way it’s going—I hope to put the British soldier on canvas and paint him better than he has ever been done before—the sleeping barrack-room and the flushed faces in the canteen, the reveille in the gray dawn and the dreary plodding of the parade—what an opportunity for a man!”

“You must miss your work here.”

“Oh, no. I get a pass every week-end for home—I live only a few miles from here at Epsom—and I spend a few hours with my paint-tubes. Nothing very much, of course—just daubing around.”

He hesitated with the Englishman’s innate diffidence.

“You know—you’re rather a stranger here—if you’d care to come along, say this coming week-end—be delighted to have you—”

"I'd love to," Harmon considered, "but I've got Tuesday with me—"

"Bring him along," Tremanner urged cordially. "Excellent chap, Tuesday. Amusing fellow and quite thoroughly experienced in soldiering."

"I'll ask him. I think he's in the canteen now. He usually is."

"Better hurry if we're to get off this afternoon," Tremanner urged. "If he's on fatigue or anything just give him the address—here, I'll write it down—and have him follow us. I'd be delighted to have him and so will the ladies, too, I know. Amusing chap—"

"Ladies? I can't picture Bob as a squire of dames—nor me in these duds."

"Oh, I get into mufti when I can," Tremanner laughed, "and I fancy I'll fix you up. And the ladies aren't frightening. Just a dear old aunt of mine and a Belgian—a refugee aunt adopted to be in the fashion."

Harmon hurried across the parade-ground to the canteen.

The low-ceilinged, smoke-filled room, with its ancient oak tables and benches, was beginning to fill up as the men dropped in from morning inspection. They were recruits mostly, with an occasional old soldier, but none above the rank of private, the tradition being that the British soldier shall enjoy his ale in sacred privacy.

Tuesday was seated over in a corner, where a black-browed, heavy-jawed veteran of Mons and Ypres supervised a "Bumble and Buck" board, otherwise known as Crown and Anchor, the oldest of soldiers' gambling devices.

Painted on the canvas square were a spade, diamond, club and heart, and an anchor and crown. The owner of the board rattled his dice in a battered wooden dice-cup and invited those in search of fortune.

"Step up, gentleman! Try your luck with the old man! Safe as the Bank of England! Undefeated because they never fought—badly bent but never broke! The old bumble and buck. Step up and put your money on the name of the game! Try the old sergeant-major! Where we lay we pay!"

Tuesday reached into his pocket and produced a shilling.

"Want to get away for the week-end?" Harmon asked hurriedly. He had a small opinion of Tuesday's ability as a gambler.

"Where to?" Tuesday asked, flipping the shilling on the square that showed the diamond.

"Tremanner has asked us to visit him," Harmon said. "Chance to get some home comforts and home cooking. Just his aunt and a Belgian lady there."

"Hell!" Tuesday grunted. "I ain't no hand with the women. Especially Belgian refugees. I seen lots of 'em around—all beef an' no English talk."

He watched the board, his eyes shining.

"Of course," he apologized, "I ain't slammin' Tremanner's folks. He's a good scout. Maybe I'll foller you out there. I'm breaking this game now an' I better stick."

The veteran glowered around the board now plentifully sprinkled with silver six-pences and shillings.

"Are we all done, gentlemen? What's the matter with more on the diamond? Does any one say a little bit of silver on the old curse? How about the curse now?"

Tuesday emptied his pocket onto the diamond square.

"Righto!" the gambler's patter rattled on with the rattle of the dice. "He backs the old curse. Now the heart! Are you all done? Up they come!"

The dice tumbled to the table showing a crown, a spade and a diamond. Harmon was agreeably surprised.

"There they are, gents!" barked the veteran. "The sergeant-major, the shovel, and the lucky old curse! Any more for any more? Let's drag the anchor a bit! Who'll put his money on the meat-hook? Cover the lucky shamrock, lads. I touch the money, but I don't touch the dice! Now, then! Copper to copper and gold to gold! Up she comes again!"

Tuesday thrust his winnings again in a handful on the crown. Harmon's arm was too late to stop him.

"Say, go easy," he cautioned.

"Nothing doin'," Tuesday snorted. "I got this game cinched."

The dice rattled out again and Tuesday reached again for his winnings.

"You're here for the day," Harmon said, shaking his head. "Here's the address. I guess you'll have to walk by the time you're through."

"Don't be spoilin' my customers, mate," the veteran of Mons warned.

Harmon's tanned jaw tightened. "Suppose you mind your own tricky affairs for a change," he suggested.

The black-browed one frowned and half rose from his seat, just as the door swung open and the sergeant of the guard popped his head in the opening.

The gaming-board disappeared as if by magic and the veteran with it. When Harmon left after a hasty glass of ale with the boisterous Tuesday, the latter was joyfully jingling a pocketful of silver and standing drinks for every one in the canteen.

"Sure," he agreed to Harmon's advice. "I'm quitting soon. Just goin' to look around a little and go to bed early. See you Sunday night."

As a matter of fact he was to see Harmon much earlier than that. Tuesday was reckoning without his ale.

CHAPTER XIII. -

DENISE.

TREMANNER'S home was more pretentious than Harmon had expected. He was still unused to the Englishman's method of self-disparagement and dislike of all forms of ballyhoo.

"Rickety old place," Tremanner said, as they walked up the short drive, "but we like it. Nothing to compare with your American homes, I fancy."

But Harmon, homeless for several years, thought it the homiest old house he had ever seen, from the moss-covered brick wall bordering the high-road to the Italian garden in back. The white, Georgian villa, mellow with age, showed up pleasingly behind the oaks that late October was gilding with yellow and gold and red.

An elderly woman, in worn black dress and snowy apron, met them at the door and Tremanner greeted her cordially.

"Miss Tremanner is in the garden, Master Harry," she informed him. "She has

been getting the studio ready for you. Miss Lorollais is with her. You've got a bit thin, if I may say so, in the past fortnight. It's that army cooking I'll wager now. Many a young gentleman's stomach will be—"

"You'll have a different opinion when you see the appetite I've brought with me," laughed Tremanner, tossing his great-coat across a chair.

He led the way up the broad stairs.

"My togs will fit you, Dick. We'll shed the king's coat for awhile—which is strictly against regulations—and find something more colorful to wear, after we wash up a bit. I like to get rid of that barrack-room odor before presenting myself to the ladies."

Clothed in white flannels, sport shoes, and a neatly-fitting coat, Harmon felt, and looked, a different man. He was a different person altogether from the shaky reveler that awoke aboard the *Barbarossa*, but clothes only accentuated the change. Camberham drill ground had worked the subtler miracle, squaring broad shoulders, brightening dull eyes, painting a clear tan and healthy red on the sallow cheeks.

Tremanner nodded approvingly.

"They look well on you. I say, it seems kind of a waste of male pulchritude on an elderly aunt and a Belgian refugee such as our friend Tuesday described."

"Kid away," Harmon grinned, adjusting his tie. "If I knew what pulchritude meant I'd get sore. Does she speak English—your aunt's ward?"

"Rather brokenly, but she conveys her meaning somehow. Ready? Righto!"

They descended the stairs, walked through a spacious drawing-room, furnished in soft-toned walnut, floored with ancient oak and lined with portraits and landscapes in oils and pastels. Tremanner pointed to one in passing, a heavily framed and somber portrait of a man remarkably like Tremanner about the forehead and eyes.

"Our only treasure here," he said. "No," he added laughing, "it's not one of mine. It's a Turner. Here we are."

He stepped aside and Harmon walked out through the long window to a terrace, overlooking a garden of winding walks and

flaming flowers. On one side the studio stood, a single story building with high, glassed roof.

A woman hurried toward them along the graveled path, a motherly person of sixty-odd, gray-haired, capable, and kindly. Harmon was introduced, was appraised with one swift glance and made to feel immediately at home. His first remark, addressing her as "Miss Tremanner" was quickly interrupted.

"Aunt Maud, young man. If I'm old enough to be Hereward's aunt, I'm old enough to be yours. And don't think for a minute I'm going to 'Mister Harmon' you either. I suppose I may call you by your first name without being suspected of making up to you. Though, goodness knows, with that curly hair I might have been tempted thirty years ago. What's his first name, Harry?"

"Dick," Harmon grinned with a red face.

"Now, that's settled," she went on brightly. "Dear me, you boys must be as hungry as bears. Now, where can Denise have got to? Do you see her, Harry?"

If Harry did not, Harmon did, and it wasn't a heavy-footed Belgian peasant he saw either.

He saw a girl of seventeen, a straight, slim figure in severe black that couldn't dim the blaze of red-gold in her hair, nor the scarlet in her full-budding lips, nor the soft and liquid gray of her shaded eyes.

It was a black frock unrelieved by any touch of color, except for the silver buckles that twinkled on her shoes, but it threw into startling relief the whiteness of her hands and throat.

Harmon realized how becoming a color black can be and also realized he was staring a shade too intently.

He heard Tremanner murmur an introduction and bowed.

"Mlle. Denise Lorollaise," the Englishman concluded. The gray, darkly-fringed eyes looked gravely at Harmon, looked down at the tip of a tiny, silver-buckled shoe, and looked shyly at Harmon again as she extended her hand—a look of frank and innocent curiosity concerning the dominant sex that bespoke an old-fashioned education far from the gadding crowd.

"Denise has also a title, or at least her uncle had," Tremanner added, with a twinkle in his eyes, "and I understand Americans are always intrigued by that sort of thing, eh, Dick?"

"He is always so gay," she smiled, using a careful, book-taught English. "Always he makes fun, makes people laugh and be happy. But it is absurd that which he says, with my lit-tle estate blown with shells, and the title of my uncle does not descend."

"I'll descend on Harry, presently," suggested Aunt Maud grimly, "if he keeps you and Dick waiting much longer for dinner with his nonsense. I'll have a bone to pick with him later, Denise, anyway. His own uncle was here yesterday again with an offer of a commission in a Yorkshire regiment that's forming. He was quite upset about Harry's staying in the ranks."

"Now, aunty," Tremanner protested, offering his arm, "we went all over that. I'd rather do my bit where I am for awhile. I'd miss half the color of it and all the romance."

Dinner was served by a neat maid, a younger edition of the elderly woman who had opened the door, and it was an excellent meal for a man just freed from Camberham barracks cooking. But it was a total loss as far as Harmon was concerned. To properly appreciate food a man should pay some attention to, and look occasionally at his plate, and Harmon spent most of his time looking at Denise, which was much more satisfying.

With her usual energy and with a considerable display of tact, Aunt Maud gradually brought him to talk about himself and the trip over on the horse-laden Barbarossa. Presently Harmon was telling the story of the trip right from the start, and he told it surprisingly well—which was, after all, not so surprising with a piled treasure of red-gold hair glowing in the candle-light across the table and shadowed eyes darker and more luminous now, hanging on every word and lighting up with a quick smile at every mention of Bob Tuesday.

"So droll," she breathed, "that large man. So like the *M. Quixote* one reads of in school."

"We must have him out here," Aunt

Maud decided. "I wouldn't miss him for anything in the world."

"Oh, he'll be here probably," Tremanner assured her. "I wouldn't be surprised if he should turn up here any time. He's that kind of a chap."

The talk swung to things American, Harmon discovering his hosts to be quite uninformed on the subject for people of their evident culture, none of the Tremanners having crossed the Atlantic since Ensign Tremanner of the grenadiers blithely lost his life at the foot of Breed's Hill in 1775, having gayly lost the family estates in Cornwall the year before at the gaming tables of Bath.

"A headstrong lad," said Aunt Maud, speaking as if it were an incident of yesterday, "remarkably like our Harry here. But that's finished with and now you're here to fight side by side with us."

After dinner, Aunt Maud fastened on Tremanner grimly and dragged him off to the library to discuss that commission in the Yorkshire regiment, and Harmon was left alone with Denise.

He sat awkwardly silent for awhile, Denise sitting straightly in a high-backed Jacobean chair, and looking, with her old-world manner, like a beautiful child playing at being queen. So dignified was her attitude, so impersonally level and calm the gaze with which she favored Harmon, and so different did she appear to him to be from any one he had ever met, that he felt as if there was more than the space of a room between them.

But, when making diffident conversation, he spoke of his life at home before the German invasion, he discovered they had something in common, after all, even if it were only their lack of immediate family.

And presently, as those things go, she was showing him proudly a picture of a soldierly figure in dress uniform, disengaging the locket from its chain.

"My father," she said softly. "Liege. The first day. He was captain. And my uncle, *le marquis*, the Lorollais were once French, you see. He died at Antwerp. My mother before, when the great shells dropped from the sky on our home. A very lit-tle home—"

She shook the red-gold hair and smiled brightly.

"But you are soldier, *monsieur*, whom we must make glad, not sad. I shall play the *chanson* that the nuns have taught me."

It was not a masterly interpretation that the slim fingers drew from the massive grand piano in the corner, but the audience was not critical. He would be exacting indeed who would require the song of the nightingale from the bird of paradise. Harmon applauded and praised, and called for encores. She declined gracefully.

"It is polite for you to say, but I am not clever at this. I prefer my horse—which they took from me—and long rides by myself along the beautiful roads I should perhaps have been a man."

"Fortunately for the opposite sex," broke in Tremanner from the doorway, "and unfortunately for their peace of mind later on, you were born a woman."

He looked keenly from Denise to Harmon, and shortly afterward every one retired up the broad oaken stairs and said their good nights on the landing.

Tremanner came into Harmon's room to smoke a cigarette and chat.

"Beautiful," he agreed to Harmon's enthusiastic description. "Yes, and intelligent, too. Remarkable poise for a girl of her age. I had her pose for me last week, became interested in my work, and realized presently that she had been sitting there uncomplainingly for two hours in one position—would make a wonderful model, quick to understand and marvelously sympathetic. But I think she is destined for more important things in life."

He laughed at Harmon's implied question.

"A wife, perhaps, for some lucky man—but she's still almost a child. What was that?"

"That" was a thud on the front door downstairs and was followed by the murmur of men's voices and the rattle of the knocker.

"Take a candle," Tremanner said. "We're rather old fashioned here you know—no electric lights. We'll see what's up."

As they neared the door the voices outside grew louder.

"Thish the place—lemme down, soldier!"

Tremanner swung the door open, revealing a couple of soldiers and a sergeant grouped around a party in the uniform of a brigadier general, cap over his eyes. The soldiers had evidently been carrying him and he was unmistakably and gloriously drunk. The sergeant spoke up.

"Drunk as a lord," he said. "'Ad a blurry orful time gettin' 'im 'ere. But this is where 'e 'ad to come, 'e says. Found 'im on the road to Camberham."

He lowered his voice, respectfully.

"A bloomin' general, too. 'E has been cursin' us out fit to blind you all the way—"

"Let's go, you poor slob," the general hiccupped. "Shake a leg before I paste you in the eye. I'm on my way to see my old side kick, Dick Harmon."

The voice was unmistakable. "Well, I'll be darned!" Harmon gasped. "If it isn't Bob—"

But Tremanner's kick in the shins stopped the outburst in time. The Englishman had recognized Tuesday's voice, even as a brigadier general, but he had also recognized the sergeant's rasping tones, and lowered the candle quickly.

It was Sergeant Narley.

"All right, sergeant," Tremanner said hurriedly. "You may leave him there for awhile. We'll take the general in when he cools off. The lights inside will be liable to excite him."

"Excite 'im," Narley snorted as he marched his detail down the path. "Gawd blimy! 'E's no shy violet now or I'll go to 'ell. Excite 'im! 'e sez."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE STUDIO.

TUESDAY sat on the edge of a couch in Harmon's bedroom the next morning and cooled his burning throat with copious drafts of cold water. Harmon and Tremanner stood over the crestfallen soldier of misfortune, in the rôle of judge and jury.

"What's that?" Tuesday asked, pointing to a gold-braided cap.

"Yours," Harmon informed him coldly.

"Last night you were a general. Where did you get it?"

Tuesday shook his head.

"It's a long story, Dick. I'm cured. Hanged if I know where I got it unless it was after the ball at the Ritz in London."

"The Ritz! What were you doing there?"

Tuesday took another drink of water. "Well, you see it was this way. I got feelin' pretty good after you left an' went to town an' what with one bar an' another things got kind of hazy. But I wasn't no general when the guy in white wig an' short pants took my hat at the door. I was a Australian colonel—"

"An Australian colonel," Harmon nodded. "It gets better right along."

"I lost my hat, darn it," Tuesday insisted, "in the lunchroom—a dump run by a guy named Lyons. I had to get one so I grabbed along the line an' the Australian one fitted me. Then I followed a gang of fellows into the Ritz, where they was a dance goin' on, an' then some dame in a diamond thing-a-majig on her head sed I insulted her, an' they give me the rush. That was where I won the outfit I was wearin'. It was over a chair, an' a guy can't be goin' around without an overcoat."

He sighed profoundly.

"So that's why them soldiers was givin' me the high sign. I sure bawled that sergeant out an' he took it like a baby, standin' around an' salutin' every time I opened my mouth. He carried my cap part of the time. We'd 'a' been here sooner only he had to keep fetchin' his bonnet that I was throwin' out the window of the taxi. Well, it sure was a lesson to me about drink."

"It sure would have been if he had taken a good look at you in the light," Harmon said grimly. "Of all the sergeants in the army you had to pick on him. Do you know who it was?"

"Couldn't see him very well. Kind of a nice, respectful guy, anyway."

"Sure. It was Sergeant Narley."

"Holy Moses!" Tuesday groaned. "That guy! Now, what am I gonna do, for the luvva Pete? I can't wear them duds back to camp."

"Not unless you want them to turn out the guard for you at the gate—and that would be about as far as you'd get. We'll have to figure some way to get you back in again as a private."

"Here," Tremanner suggested. "I've got an idea. Let Bob sit tight here the rest of the day while I run over to a friend of mine that's supply officer in the Royal Kildares and borrow a cap and service great coat. I can furnish a cap badge for him. I'll start after breakfast."

Tuesday's protests that he would take his medicine were overruled.

"You stay here," Tremanner urged Harmon. "No need for two of us to go, and you'll find this more amusing. There are books in the library for you when Aunt Maud goes to church this afternoon and the studio is unlocked. Make yourselves comfortable. I'll try to be back before dark if they'll let me get away—this chap is an old friend and he'll want to celebrate. Otherwise I'll be outside the barrack gate to-night."

"Quite right," Aunt Maud agreed, when the matter was explained. "We must not let the guard room swallow our friend Tuesday. Meanwhile, I'll take him off to chapel this afternoon for the good of his soul."

And Tuesday went meekly. Aunt Maud was that kind of a woman.

Left to himself, Harmon wandered around the house, missing Denise, who had disappeared after lunch, and he missed her presence as keenly as if he had known her a year instead of a day. He told himself it was because he was unused to women, and because it happened she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen or met—and let it go at that in the way of men not being a keen self-analyst, nor aware of the swift magic of red-gold, gleaming hair and soft, full lips.

Harmon's experience had been with the Dorine kind—and that but lightly.

He tossed aside the morocco-bound volume of Bulwer-Lytton—Aunt Maud had not progressed beyond that literary milestone—and sauntered out into the garden.

The studio door yawned invitingly. He stepped inside and looked around.

It held a kind of cathedral dimness, at

that late hour in the afternoon, the faint light through the skylights just revealing the disorder of piled canvases, half finished, the sheen of colored fabrics thrown across chairbacks and couch, the draped easel in the center, and the dais beyond.

Harmon felt that sense of peace and quiet and aloofness from the world that one finds in the silent corridors of a museum at dusk. He looked around curiously, turned toward a long window and discovered Denise.

She was seated in a tall, tapestried chair, as she had sat the night before in the drawing-room, chin resting in her cupped palm, gazing dreamily out the window. She turned to him and smiled.

"I'm intruding—" he began, apologetically.

"No." She shook her head vigorously. "It is right I should be interrupted. Sometimes I sit too long alone to think."

"Perhaps," he said tritely, "they're pleasant thoughts. In that case—"

"They are of no importance," she interrupted, and stood up. "The thoughts of a girl are foolish sometimes. Of no interest to a man—a soldier, *monsieur*, who thinks always of great things—of the bravery, of the glory to defend the right—"

"Well, we're not all as noble as that," Harmon laughed. "Mostly we're pretty ordinary clay. You don't suppose the enemy soldiers are like that?"

"I do not know. I was in a convent far away when they came."

"And you really think," he pursued, "that men are a superior kind of knight errants or something? I didn't think anybody retained—"

"It is as I have read, *monsieur*," she confessed humbly, "and thought. You must think me stupid."

She brushed lightly by him and removed the covering from the easel.

"Look. It is what Here-ward painted last week. It is of me."

She stepped back to view it better, naïvely proud of this work of a friend, without a trace of self-consciousness in viewing this reflection of her loveliness on canvas.

Harmon nodded silently. Whatever Tremanner's ability might be, here, at least, he had worked divinely. He had caught

the poise of the white throat, flowering from the somber black of the dress, the proud tilt of the chin, the promise of maturity in the curving lines of cheek and arm, and if he failed to reproduce the glow and fire and texture of her hair, it was because no man could.

"Is it not good?" she asked. "Here-ward, he worked so long."

"It is beautiful!" he breathed. "It is you—you, Denise—"

She turned to him gayly, a flash of milk-white teeth between the parted lips, and quickly—so quickly that he hardly knew it was happening—the ten-thousand-year-old savage that hides within the heart of every man, melted the veneer of civilization.

His arms closed about her lithe waist, crushed her, bent her toward him and he kissed her twice on the mouth. She struggled for a moment and relaxed, eyes closed, in his arms.

Conscience-stricken, he fell back, releasing her.

"*Monsieur!*" she said, and held her hand against her flaming cheek, her eyes still closed.

"I'm lower than a snake," he mumbled, and felt it was totally inadequate.

"Why — did — you — do — that?" she breathed.

"Because I'm not fit to be trusted near you—because I'm a beast! A rotter! I'm not fit to be here. I belong in a barrack room—and I'll take myself away now—"

She made no answer, seemed to look through and beyond him, her hand still against her cheek.

It was still there, white against red, like the white hind on the red field that had been the arms of the Lorollais for centuries, long after the studio door had slammed behind him.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCERNING LOVE, TREACHERY, AND WAR.

HARMON strode along the country road, between the tall hedge rows of Surrey—the quaint, peaceful English countryside of nursery rime—and fable—and, head down and shoulders hunched,

told himself what he thought of himself, which is an excellent thing for any one who has committed a great and crowning blunder, or a black and deadly sin.

He felt he had been guilty of both.

If he had been older and wiser in the ways of women and the world, he would have eased his conscience with specious argument and explained everything satisfactorily to himself with long-winded sophistry. But, then, if he had been so wise and case-hardened he would not have wasted his substance on the lightsome Dorine in the first place, and we would have found no interest in him at all, and if a man is fundamentally honest with himself by nature no amount of sophistry will do.

That he had violated Tremanner's hospitality by an exhibition of brutality—the expression was Harmon's—toward some one in Tremanner's care, was bad enough. But Harmon was convinced he had done worse than that—taken advantage of an inexperienced young girl's hero worship, and most deadly blunder of all, lost what slim chances he might have had of seeing Denise again.

In the three miles he had traveled in the direction of Camberham barracks after leaving Tremanner's home so hurriedly, there had been time for thought and thought was not consoling. He had disgusted Denise and lost her for good—and it had not taken him the three full miles to realize how priceless and desirable Denise had become to him in a remarkably short time.

He climbed to the top of a hill and the lights of the barracks—dimmed to guard against Zeppelin raids—showed below. He eased his pace.

Well, he wouldn't bother her again. Maybe the Dorines of the world were his speed after all. But he rebelled against that thought, too.

One thing was sure—he wouldn't risk seeing the contempt in those dark-fringed gray eyes and see her turn away from him. He would keep out of the way. It wouldn't be hard to do that, for there were very few week-ends now in England. The training squad he was in was almost ready to go over.

Soldiers tramped by him in their heavy shoes on their way to barracks, marring the serenity of the night with their clanking, martial note.

He slumped into a bench at the side of the road, overlooking the valley of Camberham, the rolling furrowed fields and sleeping farmhouses, with the rumble of a far-off, darkened, London-bound train coming faintly on the hay-scented air.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Tremanner's voice spoke beside him. "Our lovely Surrey—stripped of its sons who are now in purgatory for the sins of their fathers."

"We'll be there presently, ourselves for our own sins," Harmon answered gloomily, and made room on the bench.

"Our fathers danced here in Europe for fifty years of peace," Tremanner went on, following his own thought, "danced gayly on the edge of Armageddon, danced without a thought of to-morrow, lied diplomatically, and lived carelessly, criminally negligent, and now is the time of the gray dawn and the piper must be paid—and we've begun to pay him! Have you heard of Loos?"

"Last month's victory? It was published in orders as—"

"They lied to us—as usual," Tremanner whispered. "The customary propaganda to cover their mistakes. I spoke this afternoon to a man who knew the facts of the battle of Loos. A solid battalion of the Royal Kildares was wiped out in ten minutes—because some one on the general staff made a mistake—there were lots of mistakes at Loos."

"The young gentlemen who danced so prettily and cricketed so cleverly and the old gentlemen who should have been retired on pensions twenty years ago, hadn't studied the matter carefully enough—hadn't studied anything carefully. They had been too busy assuring us that war was impossible."

"So something like sixty thousand men were lost—my friend seemed to know the figures. Hill 70 was taken by the Highlanders, in a dashing attack and lost again for lack of organization and reserves."

"British troops were thrown into action unsupported and cut to pieces. It was, apparently, the greatest defeat of British arms

in the history of our nation—this victory they speak of. We lost all along the line. Sixty thousand men! Well—"

The shadowy figures of the soldiers passed, brass buttons glimmering, faces blots of white in the darkness. And as a group strode by they sang the popular song of the hour:

"We beat them at the Marne, we beat them
at the Aisne,
We gave them 'ell at Neuve Chapelle,
An' 'ere we are again!"

"We did not give them hell at Neuve Chapelle. As a matter of fact," Tremanner remarked. "But we will, Dick! It's the thought of all the mumble-jumble and nonsense and inefficiency outside that makes me reconciled to Camberham and Sergeant Narley. They know what they're doing anyway. They're forging the sword for England—Kitchener's Army! It's going to be up to us very soon."

The bundle he was holding rolled to the ground and he recovered it.

"What a sentimental ass I am sometimes," he laughed. "Clean forgot for the moment what I stopped for, and old Bob probably wandering around looking for his coat and cap. Didn't he come with you?"

"No. I—left in a hurry. You see—well, I'm not going to hide it from you. I may be pretty low, but—"

He stumbled through an explanation of his sudden departure. Tremanner listened and made no comment for some time after Harmon stopped speaking.

"Now what do you think of me?" Harmon insisted.

"I wasn't thinking of that aspect of it at all," Tremanner assured him, and laid a hand on Harmon's shoulder. "It's not a particularly heinous crime, and even if it were, a friendship would be rather fragile that couldn't withstand that shock. No, I'm thinking of Denise. They are a bit of a proud family and Denise has something of that herself. In the old days it would have meant pistols and coffee for two and an angry brother or father to face. But this case is different—"

"That only makes it worse!" Harmon muttered. "Now I can never see her—"

He stopped and Tremanner turned toward him though, in the darkness, neither could see the other's face.

"Are you," Tremanner asked, "in—er—in love with Denise?"

"Who wouldn't be?" Harmon cried. Tremanner left the question unanswered.

"You know, I started to tell you about Denise, last night, when we were interrupted by Tuesday's home-coming. Denise, herself, told you a few things, I think."

Harmon nodded.

"She said her father was killed at Liege and her mother during the bombardment of their home near Ypres."

"That's what she believes to be true," Tremanner said, "and I have not wanted to cause her additional pain by telling her, just yet, how her father and mother really died. A peasant from the village where the Lorollais estate was—the château is a ruin now and in disputed territory—told me the facts. Denise was in school when the war broke out and the invasion began. The facts are her father and mother both were shot by the Germans as spies—dragged from their home at daylight, tried, lined up against a wall and shot!"

"Good God! What beasts they—"

"No," Tremanner corrected, "the Germans weren't to blame altogether either. Half this talk of atrocities is just war propaganda anyway. They were probably no worse than other troops and the laws of war are strict on that point—have to be to protect troops in action. I'm not giving them a clean bill entirely but, evidently, they felt justified in taking drastic measures."

"The evidence against them—Colonel Lorollais was not in uniform, hoping to break through the enemy lines and join his command at Liege—was damning. It was manufactured evidence. A drumhead court-martial in the midst of an advance has no time to look into all the aspects of each case. And as I say, the whole affair was a plot to do away with the Lorollais."

"Why?" Harmon asked, horror-stricken. "Who was responsible?"

"The man who was suspected by the villager who told me—the villager has dropped out of sight since, probably to re-join the Belgian army—the man who testi-

fied against the Lorollais and had them shot was a blood-relative, a second cousin of some sort named Henri Lorollais. He and his wife, a jolly black pair of scoundrels from all reports, saw a chance to get the Lorollais estate by getting rid of the owners.

"Henri was a kind of a black sheep, lost what he once had at Monte Carlo, spent some time in jail for forgery, and so forth. The two of them probably hoped to do away with the whole family and might have succeeded if Denise hadn't been away at the time."

He lit a cigarette, the flare of the match lighting up his clean-cut, aristocratic profile for a moment.

"Easiest thing in the world, of course," he continued. "Enemy troops in possession, population on the run, everything in confusion, and little prospect of any one ever being the wiser when the Germans swept on in their advance. Chances are the very Germans who sat on the court and listened to his lying testimony were killed at the Marne or later. Naturally he can't get the estate with Denise still alive, but he may not know that she is. All Belgium was scattered to the four winds."

"But this Henri Lorollais," Harmon exclaimed. "He can be punished!"

"I doubt it. It would be a bit of a job to prove anything—especially now. But if he ever comes within reach of my bayonet—"

He stood up to scan the faces of the passers-by.

"I wonder what happened to General Tuesday," he murmured. "It wouldn't surprise me if he should come along disguised as a Chinese mandarin this time."

But it was a subdued and coatless private that joined them a few minutes later. Tuesday gratefully accepted the tunic and cap and the three strode down the hill to the barrack gate.

Sergeant Narley, a straight and narrow figure in shining equipment and pointed mustache, gathered in the passes as the recruits filed through the guardroom inside the gate.

"Step out!" he barked, recalling the minds of the sentimental sharply back from home and family, to the discipline of the

parade ground. "Throw those blurry shoulders back, now, before you catch a pack-drill! Keep in line, that man, damn your eyes! You'll see the guardroom soon enough!"

He looked up at Harmon.

"Number Nine squad, hey?" Narley snorted. "You're for London in the mornin', Canadian, an' Gawd 'elp the regiment is wot I says! They ain't none of you yet fit to be soldiers. Next man, and sharp!"

"Did you say London, sergeant?" a recruit asked fearfully.

"Aye, London!" Narley glared about, inviting contradiction. "Did you think you were to fight the bleedin' war at Camberham? London barracks an' the next draft an' you'll bloomin' well wish you was back 'ere, too!"

But nothing Sergeant Narley could say—and he was a man trained in caustic comment—could dampen the spirits of number nine squad. The barrack room buzzed long after it should have been quiet, and the old soldier in charge, full of the wisdom and disillusionment that years and battles bring, forebore to order silence.

London! A step nearer war and deeds of derring do! A step nearer the line—that romantic, soul-stirring line that men were holding for old England—a step nearer the pangs of battle and the glories of victory!

They were like schoolboys finishing the last term and aching for the freedom of the world outside. Every heart was light and every tongue loose, and if the old "sweat" with the beery eye and the kindly manner, was imaginative enough to visualize the long tentacles of war slowly drawing in closer, he held his peace, like a good man and true, and counted his coppers for the canteen in the morning.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SWORD OF ENGLAND.

LONDON barrack life was like the Camberham period only as the shipping warehouse is like the roaring factory.

Drills and guards were few and light. The hectic period of training was over and

the intensive, final training not to come until France was reached. More time was given over to lectures and special courses. Of these, Harmon elected to take the bombing-course—joining thereby the "suicide club"—and spent the better part of a month learning how to "lob" home-made grenades from one trench to another on Wimbledon Common, practicing the round-armed, English, cricket method of throwing.

He took his firing-course with the Lee-Enfield rifle at Wormwood Scrubs, earning the grudging praise of Sergeant Narley, who had also been ordered to London preparatory to going over again to France. Tuesday turned out to be a masterly bomb-thrower, but almost shot Narley's cap off the first day at the butts, and barely qualified as a marksman.

But the main activities in the London barracks were those of a clearing station. Every week or so the regimental band marched to Waterloo Station at the head of a long column of men from the barracks—a new draft, outfitted with new equipment and on their way to the base camp in France, there to mingle with drafts from every regiment in Britain and the colonies, until the time should come to replace casualties in the front line.

During all this time—while the mild English winter, with its yellow fogs and its sharp mornings, crept shadowlike across the murky roof-tops of London, and the shadow of war hung suspended over Flanders and Picardy—Harmon saw nothing of Denise Lorollais.

The first week-end in London Tremanner urged Harmon to join him in Surrey, and Harmon refused determinedly. Succeeding week-ends found Harmon on duty. He would have liked to have gone then, for his determination to martyr himself had vanished—melted away before the warm memory of full, proud lips and red-gold hair, conjured up in the darkness of the snoring barrack-room, night after night. He would have gone then gladly, anywhere and faced whatever scorn and contempt allotted him, to be near her again.

But then she was in the north of England, with Aunt Maud, that energetic lady having apprenticed both of them to war-work in a

temporary hospital, and the opportunity had passed.

Meanwhile, Zeppelins came and went, or stayed and perished over darkened London, Serbia had collapsed, Russia had been crushed, a remnant of British troops had withdrawn, defeated, from Gallipoli, the armies of England and France, sore-battered, strengthened their positions and held the line in the West, dreading the coming of spring and awaiting the coming of Kitchener's Army—the sword of England, so slowly being forged beyond the sea.

Men crowded into the London barracks—old soldiers with service ribbons on their tunics, and young recruits, wide-eyed with wonder at the sights of London town. They came from the seas and the countries beyond—but mostly they came from the farms and towns and factories and mines.

They came in squads from Camberham, were equipped with new bayonet, rifle, pack, and identification-disk, made their wills in their army pay-books and marched away.

Then, with the first hint of spring, came the thunder from across the Channel, trainloads of wounded rolled into Victoria Station, long lines of stretchers were carried between the banks of fearful and expectant women that lined the platform searching each white face that passed—and Harmon found his name listed.

The bulletin-board outside the barrack room bore a terse and ominous typewritten message:

The following officers, non-commissioned officers, and men are warned to be in readiness to proceed overseas to join the expeditionary force.

Then followed a list of names and toward the end:

Narley, M., Sgt., 2586
Ruffit, E., 9780
Baffin, J., 9775
Walton, P., 9601
Harmon, R., 9723
Tuesday, R., 9724

"That's more like it," Tuesday exclaimed happily. "Now we'll get a real chance to soldier. This peacetime soldiering never did suit me none anyway. When do we go?"

"You get four days' leave first," Tremanner informed him. "A chance to give a farewell party, say your last words to your friends and so forth. How about it, Dick? You chaps want to spend it with me down in Surrey?"

"But—your—your aunt. Aren't you going to see her, too?"

"Aunt Maud is a terror for traveling," Tremanner grinned affectionately. "She's in the north now somewhere making sure the war is being properly conducted in that quarter. I'll be lucky if I get a glimpse of her—and Denise—at the railway station before we leave. I'll try and forward a letter to wherever she is to-night through the war hospital. In the meantime the three of us will celebrate conservatively with a few visits to the music-halls and four good nights' sleep away from the barracks."

"Suits me," Tuesday agreed, "so long as they don't go off without us."

"Don't worry," Tremanner assured him. "They won't forget you, if they have to send a corporal and four men after you to remind you. No easy changing regiments now and 'going over the hill.' Once your name is down you're for it and no mistake. You're as good as in France on active service."

So Tuesday spent four pleasant days, with no Sergeant Narley to roar him out of bed in the mornings, and Harmon spent four rather dismal days in spite of the music-halls. Denise was everywhere, invisibly.

He stood with Tremanner in the dust-covered studio, and could almost see the slim, straight figure in the high-backed old chair by the window.

"Rather mournful looking, isn't it?" Tremanner said, but whether he meant the absence of Denise or the gloomy aspect of the place, with its half-finished pictures that might never be finished and its easel that might never be used, he did not say. He was not the man to display his emotions for the world to gaze on in spite of his enthusiasm over Kitchener's Army.

Two days later the draft—two hundred strong—lined up on the drill-square within the gray-walled inclosure, Harmon and Tuesday and gawky Ruffit and Tremanner in the center and Narley, a grim ramrod of

a man, on the flank, and listened to a farewell speech by the depot commandant, while the recruits of the London Light Infantry stood at attention on the sidelines.

"Good-by and good luck," the speech ended, "and always remember you carry the honor of the London Light Infantry with you. Some of you will not come back from France. To those I say good-by indeed—and for the rest a glorious return."

Drums and cymbals crashed in unison, cheers billowed in deafening waves from the recruits, from the crowds on the sidewalks, and the column plowed through the mass of relatives and friends that hurried along to keep up with the marching men.

Hats and handkerchiefs waved from windows and doorways and from the lines of Londoners on the curb—for Kitchener's Army drafts might march away every day, and did but the enthusiasm was ever fresh—and the band pounded away gayly in front, and presently Waterloo Station hove in sight, with the empty trains waiting under the shed.

Women everywhere—dry-eyed and tearful, frightened and brave, white-faced and smiling, or trying hard to smile—women carrying children, carrying parcels of home-baked food—women of fashion and women of toil—all breaking into the ranks to hold in their arms, for one brief moment, the men of their hearts' desire, the children of their hearts' blood—women who gave heroically to the great, black god that brooded over France, and women who gave dumbly, unprotesting and bewildered.

Harmon gazed around and was glad he had no one there, whose clinging hands he would have to tear from his shoulders, looked again and saw Denise and the pounding of his pulses was louder in his ears than the booming of the blaring band.

She was standing between Tremanner and the silent, tight-lipped Aunt Maud, and the dark-fringed, clear eyes were turned away. Tremanner beckoned to Harmon.

Face to face with Denise again, all the things that Harmon had wanted to tell her seemed to evaporate leaving his mind a blank. He was like a man suddenly called upon to address an expectant audience on a subject that he knew nothing about.

"It was good of you to come," he said gruffly, and then after a long pause: "I hardly hoped you would make the long journey."

"It was nothing, *monsieur*." She was much the more composed of the two.

"That—that day in the studio—I didn't know what I—"

Whistles sounded along the platform. The raucous voice of Sergeant Narley came from behind him. Men hurriedly brushed by.

Her lips moved forming the words that were barely audible above the blasts from the locomotive and the shouts from the platform.

"You must go, *monsieur*! See, you must go!"

"Denise! Denise!" Eyes and voice pleaded with her and for a second her hand lay crushed in his broad palm—only for a second before he turned away and jumped aboard the moving train.

"Thought we'd lost you," Tuesday said, helping him aboard the compartment. "Old sour-face Narley's been cursin' you from here to Kingdom Come."

He settled back in his seat and produced a flat bottle.

"A stitch in time," he explained apologetically. "I don't aim to be seasick crossin' the Channel to-night an' they say it's a long trip from Southampton to Havre. This is slow-actin' medicine so I better start now."

He was not seasick at all, but very jovial, when, under cover of darkness the crowded transport slipped out of Southampton that evening with a gunboat at either flank.

"Well," he grinned happily, "they give us a great send-off anyways. They was some swell dames on the platform when we left. I had three of them lamping me. But they ain't in it with that French gal Aunt Maud adopted. She's real class when it comes to looks an' style, an' she's a real good kid, too. Here's somethin' she give me for you, Dick. I got one, too. It's a 'housewife' with needles and thread an' everything. Made it herself."

Harmon made no answer but reached for the little packet and held it tightly in his hand.

Back in peaceful Surrey, the "French gal," with her feet tucked into tiny bou-doir slippers, sat on the edge of Aunt Maud's bed and looked away from Aunt Maud and at the fluttering candle.

"And do the Americans then, Aunt Maud, fear—fear love that they should always fly from it? When one knows it is useless to try to get away. Love is everywhere then. It is with you when he is gone—"

Aunt Maud sat up very straight in bed, quite grim in her nightcap.

"My dear, what is it you are saying? H-mm! I see. The American, my dear?"

"I thought" Denise whispered, "I thought the world could see me waiting there—for him to say it to me—to know that he felt, too, this love—and then I knew—a little moment and now he has gone away—"

And the rest was blurred in the dampened shoulder of Aunt Maud's Victorian nightgown, and Aunt Maud, for all her iron reserve, wept also into her pillow that night—the futile tears of women shed over Kitchener's Army.

For the sword of England was not whetted in blood alone.

CHAPTER XVII.

POPERINGHE.

FIVE miles from Havre, on the plateau of Harfleur, was the great British base-depot, where drafts from every regiment in the Empire—infantry, cavalry, artillery, medical corps, service corps, men from line regiments and drafts from the Guards, men of every color and race, Highlanders, Anzacs, turbaned Sikhs and Gurkhas, Canadians, soldiers from Irish regiments, Welsh regiments, Liverpool regiments, black regiments from Africa, brown regiments from India—were gathered together in one vast camp, as diversified and colorful a gathering as had assembled in Europe since the days of the Crusades.

They drilled in separate units on the parade grounds under the hot sun, and at night thronged the streets of Havre, crowding into the cafés and the garish brothels

that lined certain streets, licensed by the authorities and guarded by the military police.

On their first free day Harmon and Tuesday and Tremanner strolled where they could and saw East Indians squatting about their cooking pots, prepared by their own cooks so that their caste should not be affected, watched half-naked negroes, in an hour of rest, dance barbaric steps to the music of a tom-tom, watched over by their white officers and applauded by grinning Australians—listened to almost every tongue spoken in the civilized and uncivilized world except German and every accent known to English from the broad brogue of Donegal to the soft patois of Quebec.

"It's like a blamed world's fair," Tuesday decided, "or a mining camp in the middle of a gold rush. Believe me, Coney Island has nothin' on this dump!"

"Not much short of a million men here, I understand," Tremanner said, as they turned back toward the canvas hut, that they shared with twelve others of the "London Lights." "And not all of them Kitchener's Army either. You'd wonder how they disentangle them to send them up the line in any kind of order or system. Going to Havre to-night, Dick?"

Harmon reddened and lit a cigarette.

"No. What I hear about it from the fellows in the hut is plenty for me. Organized vice is a little too strong for my stomach and I'm no prude."

"Me, too," Tuesday agreed. "There's plenty to see right here in camp."

But underlying the apparent confusion of tongues and races and regiments was the iron hand of discipline, as they were soon to discover with the unfortunate Ruffit as the example.

He had always been Sergeant Narley's pet aversion. The human ramrod saw in the shambling gait and clumsy drill of the elderly man-of-all-work, a constant affront to Sergeant Narley—a personal insult since it indicated an instance of the raw, civilian Kitchener's Army that Narley despised, that Narley's methods of training men had failed.

The sergeant was a man pitiless on the drill ground, and his bowels held no compas-

sion for the weak and unfit. He had tried to break Ruffit at Camberham—break him and cast him loose from the army if he couldn't come up to the requirements of the London Light Infantry, and somehow Ruffit had got by.

Narley was in charge of the squad at bayonet-practice, given by a corporal named Jaggard, a dark, taciturn, heavy-browed veteran, just up from the hospital, with a reputation for having personally bayoneted twelve Germans at Loos—a man with a face of granite and an arm of steel.

The squad lined up before the straw-filled dummies.

"At the left groin—long point!" the instructor commanded.

Ruffit, standing beside Harmon, missed his dummy and the rifle left his hands. The bayoneter of Loos swerved just in time, and tugged his webbing belt free from the sharp weapon, without turning a hair.

"Not me, you stupid man," he growled, "the dummy. Wake up!"

Narley strode forward, threateningly.

"I'll wake the swine up!" he snarled. "Put 'im down for a pack drill."

Ruffit's dull face clouded over. "Don't miscall me them nymes, you bleedin' bully. Swine yerself, that's wot!"

So that Ruffit was immediately clapped between two men and paraded at the quick step to the barbwire inclosure where the "bad boys" were kept and the next day faced the major commanding the detail, with a stern sergeant-major on one side and Narley on the other.

"Insubordination and disrespectful language to an N. C. O.," the sergeant-major reported. "Sergeant Narley, sir."

"I thank 'ee, sir, for leave to speak—" Ruffit began.

"Shut up!" said the sergeant-major.

"No excuse for that sort of thing," the major snapped. "Two days first field punishment. Letting you off lightly at that."

The major had never done field punishment himself, so he was no judge of what was really light. It consisted of being locked up on short rations during the hours off duty, drilling with a heavy pack while the rest of the troops were packless and two hours of being "tied to the wheel."

Harmon and Tremanner ran across a sight that was to become increasingly familiar, as they walked toward the depot cinema that evening.

It consisted of two lines of wooden railing, like an ordinary fence, stretched across a corner of the vast drill ground, with thirty or forty men, including Ruffit, standing against the rails, with arms outstretched, tied by the wrists to the upper one and by the ankles to the lower rail. Military police strolled watchfully up and down the line.

"So," whistled Tremanner softly, "that's what they call 'tying to the wheel.' Barbarous! I have an idea Sergeant Narley is not going to be overpopular in spite of the medals he wears. Let's get back."

Further on he laughed quietly, and Harmon asked him the reason.

"Struck me as funny—this army business—in some of its manifestations. All those chaps tied up like naughty school-boys are volunteers—not service men that came into the army in peace time to find an easy living and were caught in the war. They must feel they've been jolly well had all around.

"And the military police officer in charge I recognized. The dignified captain—he's the butler I was telling you about. Last time I saw him I called him James, and he liked it. I wouldn't try it now. It's a topsy-turvy business."

A week later the men from the London Light Infantry, with another draft recently out from England, climbed into third-class carriages, and were drawn, with many stops to let ammunition trains and Red Cross trains rumble by, toward the front line by an absurdly small and asthmatic locomotive.

With them went Sergeant Narley and the dark and taciturn bayoneter of Loos.

They detrained at Poperinghe, behind the Ypres salient, at night and were marched through a drizzling rain past ruined streets and squares, in a blackness punctuated by flashes far away, to the quarters of the Fifteenth Battalion, London Light Infantry, in rest billets near the public square.

The billet assigned to the new draft was

a deserted and furnitureless remnant of what had been a respectable middle class Belgian home.

Harmon, Ruffit, Tuesday, and Tremanner were assigned to the same bare room by a yawning company sergeant-major, awakened from sleep by the arrival of the draft. He motioned with a lantern he was carrying.

"Muck in there for the night, you men, and don't go turnin' out the blurry guard every time a rat runs across you. This isn't Blighty you're in now. No lights and pipe down. The rest of the troops wants sleep."

He was not at all the spick and span sergeant-major they were accustomed to meet at Camberham and London. There was mud caked on his boots and his buttons had not seen a button stick for ages. He was lean, brown, and haggard about the eyes, with that set, staring look about the pupils, that men acquire who are often subjected to the hysteria of battle—a look that Harmon and the other healthy looking, well fed recruits would acquire themselves in time. But he had the square-shouldered parade look for all that.

A whistle blew shrilly in the street below.

"There goes the warning," the sergeant-major jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "Keep your silly 'eads inside now. You won't get 'urt. Just an airplane raid."

"What company are we assigned to, sir?" Harmon ventured to ask.

"Three Company—mine. An' look sharp to get on parade on time to-morrow."

He left, swinging his lantern, and cursing the narrowness of the stairs.

"Well," Tuesday said, rolling up in his blanket, "they seem milder here than in Camberham. Talks real peaceful after what we're used to."

"You're in the line now," Tremanner's voice came from a corner. "All together—captains, colonels, corporals and privates—in a messy, bloody business requiring discipline, but comradeship, too. I fancy it will be easier some ways—and harder, too."

"This is my meat," Tuesday boasted. "I'd rather be here any day."

Some one near at hand seemed to drop a large basketful of crockery from the top of

a ten-story building with a crash that made every one in the darkened room jump nervously. Another explosion sounded closer, shaking the broken plaster from the ceiling in a snowstorm of lime. A third blast was louder than either of the other two, leaving Harmon's ears singing painfully for a full minute of silence.

"What the hell!" Tuesday muttered in a stage whisper, and they all, in spite of the sergeant-major's orders, crowded to the broken window.

Searchlights flickered across the sky, caught for a fleeting instant a silvery speck, not much bigger than a gnat, beneath the clouds. Antiaircraft guns, firing in a five-burst rapid *pom-pom-pom-pom-pom*, kept up a crackling fire, each tiny shell, on exploding, adding another patch of cottony white to a veritable snowstorm around the silvery gnat.

Then everything became quiet again suddenly and the whistles sounded up and down the street.

Passing below them at a stumbling trot, came four laden men, one on each corner of a stretcher. Another man hurried alongside. By the light of the lantern he carried, the recruits caught a glimpse of a still form on the stretcher, one arm dangling limply over the side where the hurrying bearers had neglected to replace it, and dropping from the lax fingers a thin trail of red along the cobblestones.

"You were saying," Tremanner said softly to Tuesday, "you'd rather be here in the line—"

"Aw, dry up!" Tuesday blurted. "A guy can't even make a remark!"

"Sorry," grinned Tremanner, and they all went quietly—and a little thoughtfully—to bed, on the plaster-covered floor.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LINES OF THE LONDON LIGHT.

LANCE-SERGEANT BOWLES, of Third Company, "old sweat," with nine years of service and two solid years of France, leaned his muddy back against the parapet, and blinked sleepily through the periscope at the dawn creeping through

the barbwire. He had seen many dawns since 1914 and he was more bored than interested—unlike the men of the new draft that had come into the line for the first time the night before.

"Another blurry day," he yawned, "and like to be a peaceful one for a change. Roll on duration or a hospital cot! Keep your 'ead below the top, that big lad, if you want to stay with us."

Tuesday, standing on the firing step that was carved from the clay, eighteen inches above the floor of the trench, grinned amiably.

"Looks real quiet, an' that's a fact, sarge. I was just a-lookin' for the front line I read about. Comin' up in the dark into this ditch the way we did I kinda lost track of the way—"

A whisper—the merest, tiniest hiss in the world—passed by his left ear.

"Climb down, you blurry ass," Bowles mumbled, stuffing black tobacco into a blacker pipe. "This is the front line an' you'll bleedin' well know it, too, if that sniper locates you."

Tuesday ducked hurriedly. "You kiddin' me? Say, we dug better trenches than this back in Camberham! Deeper an' safer, too! Where's all the sandbags an' the concrete an' all that?"

"Best write to the noospapers, mate, an' make yer complaint," Bowles soothed. "Like as not they'll send Lloyd George an' a bunch of them bloomin' patriots out to see wot the brave lads in karky is doin' holdin' the line fer England.

"Then we'll build 'em nice an' deep an' safe an' them blokes will sneak up like a bunch of scared 'ens, take a quick *dekko* around an' run back to write about the 'orrors they seen. 'Course it's the front line. You're in the poor, blurry infantry now, not the glorious Army Service Corps an' the brave lads of the military police—"

"When do we eat?" Tuesday asked. "I could punish a good—"

"Wot?" Bowles looked around with a feeble imitation of well bred annoyance. "Do you mean to tell me them waiters 'asn't shown up yet with the 'ot breakfasts? Things 'as come to a pretty pass when a pore British soldier don't get 'is kippered

'erring of a morning. Like as not the blighters 'as lost their napkins or somethin'. They'll be forgettin' to draw our baths next. Well, we'll just 'ave to get along with bully beef. Just 'it this tin of jam with your bayonet a bit an' we'll see wot's inside."

Tremanner, examining a map he had picked up in Poperinghe, reached for the periscope and shoved its top cautiously over the edge of the parapet. He beckoned to Harmon and handed the periscope to him.

"Take a look through that and I'll show you something interesting."

Harmon, placing his eye to the aperture, took his first look at No Man's Land.

Immediately in front of the trench rusted barbwire, in which were discarded bully beef tins and *débris* of all kinds, made a thin and ineffectual looking barrier. Beyond stretched several hundred yards of overgrown farmland, shattered tree trunks and acid-burned shrubbery. In the distance was a thin, whitish line running uphill and down, a line of sandbags, behind which keen enemy eyes were on the watch.

Here and there on the low horizon were crumbling walls, the remains of flourishing communities of Flemish farmers. Directly in the rear, two or three miles away, was the only remaining landmark—the tottering wall of the Cloth Hall at Ypres. As Harmon gazed at the deserted and ruined city, a shell plowed lazily through the sky overhead and fell with a dull crash near the Cloth Hall, raising a cloud of dust that settled down immediately.

"Ypres," Tremanner murmured. "That's what we're here to defend—such as it is. Hardly looks worth while, does it? But that pile of broken stone and plaster represents an ideal. We'll never let them get it."

"Not likely," Bowles snorted, having opened his can of jam. "Too many lads 'as gone West now to let Fritz 'ave it. 'Eeps ' they calls it an' they are right. It's 'eaps an' 'eaps of ruins now."

Tremanner placed a finger on the map.

"Which direction is Langvoorde, sergeant, from here?"

Bowles jerked his finger toward the south.

"You'll see a church tower over there—"

Fritz left it like 'e left the Cloth 'All, I fancy, to make an aiming-point for 'is guns. That's it."

Tremanner took the periscope and sighted it along the line.

"There," he said, handing it back to Harmon, "midway between the Cloth Hall and the church tower. See that mound of rubbish and the remains of a tree?"

Harmon nodded. "What's that?"

"The Lorollais place. Where Denise was born. That's her estate—or what they left of it."

For a long while Harmon's eyes were riveted on the mirrors of the periscope. Even the thrills of his first day in the line, the silent filing into the trench under cover of darkness, the "standing to," at dawn, with fixed bayonets, the tense hours of sentry duty, watching the flashes of guns in the distance and the drifting night lights overhead—these things were unimportant compared to the sight of those deserted ruins, the violated shell of the home where Denise had lived, and grown to womanhood.

"And the man that was responsible for killing her people—this Henri Lorollais," Harmon muttered, "I wonder what happened to him?"

"Took care of himself," Tremanner frowned. "You can depend on that. Probably took what he could lay his hands on and let the guns finish the place. I doubt if he stayed in German territory however friendly he might have been with them. Once the iron ring closed around him he would be cut off from the rest of the world for the duration of the war."

"Just imagine," Harmon mused, "this is the last frontier right here! Out beyond where the sandbags start is outer darkness—like the ancient wall that the Romans built to keep out the barbarians. I wonder how they feel over there."

"About the same as we do, I fancy," Bowles said, walking up to them to regain the periscope. "Workin' as we are to do their job an' disgusted with it, too, like as not. It was a blurry poor job the day I took on to do it for a dirty shillin' a day, an' short rations most of the time."

"But we're right," Tremanner protested. "It's a just cause—"

"Aye," Bowles spat into the bottom of the trench, "but I've been out 'ere two bleedin' mortal years come next August an' I'm fair ready for the preachers an' the politicians to do a bit now. I do my work best I knows 'ow, but I ain't blowin' no 'orns abaht it. Now we'll arrange a bit of a guard, an hour each, an' the rest of us can get down to it until the Fritz wakes us up along of noontime with 'is big uns."

Bowles was right about the "big uns." The booming of the daily "strafe" awakened Harmon at mid-day from an uncomfortable sleep in a muddy rabbit-hole dug-out in the side of the trench, and for the rest of the day he smoked, speculated, and drowsed with the rest.

Nightfall brought renewed activities in the Ypres Salient. In accordance with custom, just before dusk—the quiet moment of evening when the artillery had quieted down and the machine guns had not yet started their all-night rattling—the word was passed down to "Stand to," and the men of the Third Company, bayonets fixed, mounted the firing-step and watched for an hour, peering through the shadowy barb-wire for a possible attack.

"Queer, isn't it?" Tremanner whispered. "All along the line, from Switzerland to the Channel, they're standing to, mile after mile—"

"Stop that talking!" came sharply from Sergeant Bowles.

Narley, and the platoon commander, Lieutenant Steele, appeared around a corner of the trench.

"Everything all right, sir," Bowles reported.

Steele, a keen and energetic subaltern, stopped as he passed Harmon.

"One of the new draft?" Harmon sprang to attention and saluted.

"Yes, sir. Private Harmon—"

"Put that damned 'and down!" Narley rasped. "Shall I take 'is name, Mr. Steele, for disobeying regulations in—"

"Never mind. Remember, Harmon, there's no saluting here, and you must keep your eyes on the wire all the time. That's where we're in danger of attack at dusk. Don't let anything distract you from that. The four days' tour here means four days of

constantly on the alert. You've explained to them that no man is to remove any part of his equipment nor leave his rifle out of his hand asleep or awake the whole time, sergeant?"

"Yes, sir," Narley lied readily. As a matter of fact, he had forgotten that important detail.

Steele nodded and they disappeared around a curve in the line.

Presently word was passed along to "Stand down," and the nightly work commenced—parties detailed to go back to the reserve line and bring up the rations and water, working parties detailed to carry on the never-ending labor of filling sandbags to strengthen the collapsing walls, sentries posted in each bay in couples to guard against trench raids by the enemy—while up and down the line, here and there, German and British machine guns poured their fitful bursts of lead into the dark, firing desultorily at nothing in the hope of hitting something.

Harmon, in the act of shoving a spade-ful of clinging clay into a sack paused and gazed over the top of the parapet.

Even from his lowly position barely above the top of the ground, it was a spectacle, that once seen, was never to be forgotten. On either side of him, the lines of the famous salient, thrust like a spear-point into the heart of the enemy country, bent back toward Ypres, curving again outward and running southward for two hundred miles over hill and valley, and as far as he could see—miles of country—it was a line of fire brilliant with the flashes of rifle and gun and trench-mortar colorful with many lights, red and green signal-rockets, daz-

zling, white, floating starlights that drifted across the lines lighting up the devastated country with a noonday glare.

As he watched a raindrop splashed on his cheek and a flash in the sky—a flash not manufactured by man—creased a crooked path across the blackness.

"Aye," Bowles snorted blasphemously, "send it down, Davy! We ain't got troubles enough with them blasted sandbags. But we can beat yer bloomin' whizzbangs right down 'ere, when we get started!"

The rain poured down, irrespective of Bowles's contempt, and the lightning shot across the heavens, even if the thunder was drowned in manmade noises. The men struggled into their rain-capes, reversing the rifles they carried slung across their shoulders, so that the barrels would not be wet. Harmon's helmet cascaded the water down his back and he was wet through within a few moments. On the firing-step the sentries strained their eyes to see through the curtain of rain that draped No Man's Land.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Tremanner shouted in Harmon's ear, as a streak of bright light cut across the sky. "Magnificent!"

"Maybe it is," grumbled Harmon. "You're certainly a glutton for beauty I'll—"

In a sudden lull a man's voice called out sharply on the right and with the words came the sharp smack of a rifle. Then a quick fusillade of shots, men's voices, drowned in the blast of exploding bombs and something passed close to Harmon's head and burst against the wall of the trench, singing his hair with its flame.

"Stand to!" Bowles roared. "They're on top of us!"

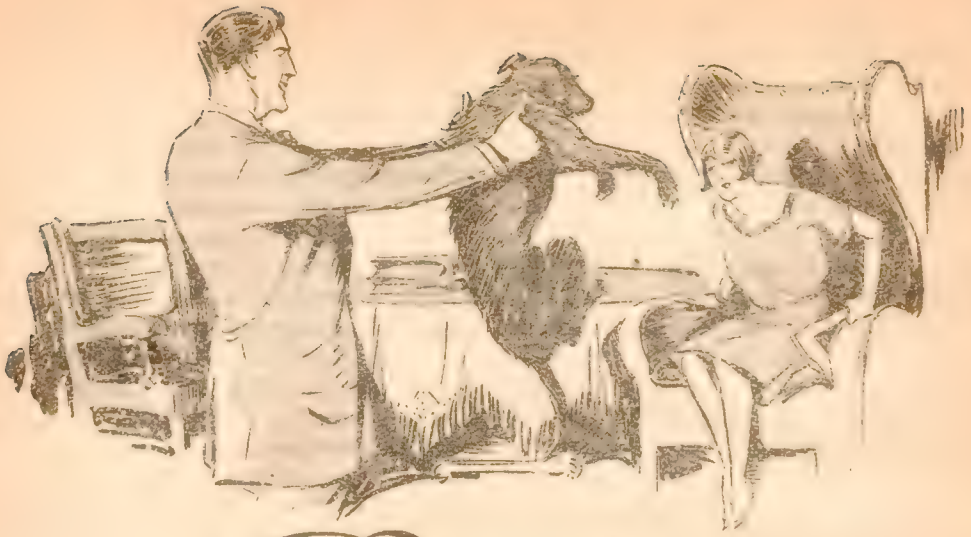
TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



FIFTY - FIFTY

By JACK BECHDOLT

is our next week's Complete Novelette, describing what happens when a wife is employed in the same concern as her husband and shoots faster to the top, acquiring the privilege of hiring and firing. Both married and unmarried readers will find it equally absorbing.



Buster

By BEATRICE ASHTON VANDEGRIFT

COME my husband's homecoming honk over the back lots. I heard it, but continued perusing the magazine article I was reading on "Why the Modern Wife Is a Failure—By a Bachelor Girl Who Knows."

Time was when, at that self-same honk, I would drop whatever I was doing, promptly apply a pat of powder to my nose, fluff up my bob and skate across the kitchen linoleum to greet him at the door.

He always drove across the back lots coming home from the factory. It was quicker than the long way around by Fairview Boulevard, on which was situated our home.

When we first come there the view was only "fair" and the Boulevard all "bull," but a persuasive salesman had inveigled us into buying a lot and building our little love nest on the installment plan, and by the time we are ready to move it 'll be paid for.

I heard Roy's honk, but kept on reading. When you've been married six long months

you get a little careless. Breaking your neck to meet, on the outside, the same good old Roy you know darn well is coming inside gets to be a little silly, especially if you are curling your hair or there is a cake in the oven.

So though Roy still kept honking his homecoming from force of habit, I remained right where I was and kept on doing just what I was doing, wry-locked and shiny-nosed. And if Roy sometimes seemed kinda wistful as he tramped through the house to find me and plant a kiss on my cheek or neck or whichever, he never said nothing.

On this particular April evening when the sun slunk to sleep over the back lots and the next-door neighbor, home from work, was kidding himself he was growing a garden by the simple delusion of placing fancy seed packages over the graves of the seeds he had planted, I listened to Roy's honk with my customary indifference.

No. Not indifference—just the sweet,

secure feeling that he was home on time, as he always was, and would soon be tramping through the house to kiss me.

I heard the Rolls Rough rattle to rest, the bang of the screen door, a smothered darn as Roy narrowly missed the drain pan I always forgot to put back under the ice box. I calmly turned a page and adjusted the back of my neck for his kiss. None come.

He stopped in the kitchen and I heard the slow trickle of the sink tap and the noise of the china cupboard doors opening, then the settling of a saucer on the floor.

"There, go to it, old boy," Roy was saying in gentle accents. "That was what you wanted, wasn't it?"

What in the world?

Come Roy's voice again, gentle still, though firm. "No, no more, sir. When a guy's been as dry as you've been he oughtn't to be lapping up no lake right away. Take it easy, feller. There's more where this come from. Now, trot on in and meet the missus."

I looked up from my magazine, curious.

Roy was standing in the doorway, beaming like a boy scout that's just done a good deed, and beside him teetered a puppy with legs like a baby camel I seen once at the zoo and tangled fur the color of the dirt in the back yard.

"Introducing Buster," grinned Roy, with the flourish of a ringmaster showing off the prize elephant.

"Roy," I gasped, "where did you get *that*?"

"Out back. Almost made hash out of him, coming across lots. Was prospecting for water in an ash heap, poor mutt. His tongue still looks like dried bologna."

"Whose is he?" I inquired with polite interest.

"Ours."

"Roy McGuire!" I shrieked. "Do you mean we're gonna keep him?"

"Sure. Why not? I thought you liked dogs, hon."

"Yeah, I do. The kind that Mrs. Van Bilkedmore would show at the dog show. But this comedy strip canine— What is he anyhow, Roy—English bull or French poodle or Russian wolfhound or what?"

"All American."

"Which makes him plain mutt, I suppose."

"But clever," put in Roy. "You ought to see the tricks I had him doing out there. He'd make Houdini look helpless. And what he don't know we can learn him. Now, have we got any bread or milk, dear?"

"We got a loaf of bread I was going to use for a stuffing to-morrow and just enough milk for the cereal in the morning. You know we only get a quart a day, Roy. We ain't Rockefeller."

"I'll eat my cereal dry," declared my spouse, magnanimous. "If a horse can do it, I can. Gee, Molly, this poor mutt's so thin, if he didn't have hair on him you'd think he was spaghetti."

"No, he ain't no raving beauty," I agreed, unenthusiastic. "I don't see what you want him for anyhow."

Roy picked up the pup and planted him protectingly against his shirt front.

"A—a guy always likes some kind of a dog," he explained wistful.

The pup made a pass for Roy's chin with his panting, pink tongue.

"Nix," laughed Roy, jerking his head back from the affectionate onset. "None of that mush stuff, Buster. That's all right with the ladies, but it don't go here."

At this junction I commenced to realize that he had bestowed no homecoming kiss on the little wife. In fact, he was showing no immediate signs of doing so.

"Put him down, Roy," I ordered, suddenly snappish. "He's getting your good shirt all dirty—the poor mutt," I added, a little more kindly, even touching his blunt, brown forehead. "Now I'll get the milk. He can have my share, too."

My magnanimity went as unnoticed as a widow's mite in the collection plate of a Fifth Avenue church. Roy was tenderly engaged in extracting a burr from Buster's brown coat.

"Let's see. He can sleep under the kitchen table," went on Roy, thoughtful. "But he'd better have a blanket or something. It's gonna turn cool to-night. Have we got a blanket he can have, hon?"

"Oh, yeah," I sneered, irritable at Roy's turning the whole house upside down for

a stray pup that nobody loved. "Why not take our one and only all wool right off our beds? As long as it stays above zero I can put up with sheets."

"Well, then, isn't there something else he can sleep on?"

"I suppose he could have my bed," I said, sarcastic, "seeing as how we ain't got no guest room."

Roy didn't seem to catch the ironic notes in my accent. He was pursuing an elusive animate object that was playing tag in and out of the puppy's left ear.

At its capture and ensuing annihilation, the pup looked up grateful at Roy and tried to enforce a long, wet lick on his chin. Roy dodged it, laughing.

"Never mind," he answered me, good-natured. "I'll find something myself." And he tramped resolute to the small cubby he fondly called his "den," emerging in a minute with his old black sweater.

I gasped.

That old shabby sweater was as sacred to him as a black cat to an ancient Egyptian, and even I had learned to leave it alone. He had had it in his dear old high school days and there was a big, dirty red "A" on the front that he had won for being some kind of an athlete.

Many was the time I had tried to make off with that sweater, but he had always rescued it with a yelp of protest. And now here he was offering it of his own free will as bed and lodging to a pestiferous pup.

The thought galled me at the time, though I didn't exactly realize it. I meandered to the kitchen and commenced mashing the potatoes as though I had something against 'em, the while waiting for a sudden sweet kiss to be planted on the nape of my neck.

None came.

Roy brushed past me twice, once to tenderly arrange the dog's bed and another time to give him water. And the only attention he paid me was to invite me to form a duet of admiration with him over the intelligent way the pup yawned, or the cunning way he laid down, or the knowing way he would look at you with his eyes. What else would he look at you with?

I waited all night for that kiss. Once I heard Roy start to wakefulness. Then

come a soft, feeling sound in the dark as he groped for his slippers. But he tiptoed past my bed and stalked to the kitchen, whence filtered a lot of sweet nothings.

"All right, boy? Warm enough? That's right, feller. Stay where you are. That's—all—right."

I finally sunk to sleep with a queer lump clogging my throat, like a lemon seed stuck in a soda straw.

The next morning, instead of leaving me with the customary farewell osculation, Roy left me with a lot of advice and instruction as to the dear dog's diet and bath. You'd think the pup was the prize patient in a high class hospital for nervous and rich women, the way he talked.

But I merely listened, wide-eyed and attentive, to his instructions, holding back the pup till his honk died away over the lots.

I even attempted petting the animal, but he eased away from my hand, though he followed me, indifferent but dutiful, all over the house as I done my morning work.

At eleven o'clock I got around to his bath, debating a minute whether to use the bath tub or the dish pan. Each pleased my delicate sense the way cleaning the sink would Salome, but I finally decided on the dish pan. It would be easier to replace than the bathtub.

Roy had told me the water must be luke-warm, as a dog's skin is sensitive to temperature. From the looks of it, I should say it would be impervious to anything, but I had promised to obey my husband, though I didn't think at the altar that it would come to this, so I took special care to get the water as lukedly warm as possible.

Corralling Buster by the back of the neck, I plunged him into the dish pan and tried to sit him down. I might as well have tried to throw a steer. Buster would not sit. He writhed frantic, and give a sudden leap out of my arms, running to cringe behind the cook stove.

Ten minutes later I dragged him thence by one hind leg and, after pressing him gently to my bosom to still his fears, soused him again.

Here I begun to realize I should have

used an apron. My dainty frock looked as if it had been illustrated by Tony Sarg, in silhouette. Buster was certainly making his mark in the world.

Holding him firmly by the head and trying to keep him from standing up, I had to content myself with dousing one-third of the now cooled water down his back and two-thirds down my front. But I soaped him thoroughly with my own facial soap, rinsed him like a good housekeeper does spinach, and dried him in my best bath towel, adding a final chic touch of violet toilet water. Roy would have no complaints to make.

Dear Roy! I *would* try to be a good wife to him. I even rushed down to the corner butcher shop and spent my movie money for the week on a real club steak, the kind he loved. I also spent an hour and a half over the kitchen stove, grilling that steak just the way he liked it, while the pup began to look interested for the first time since Roy left.

Prompt at five forty-five come the triumphant toot of my hubby's home coming. At the time I was engaged in inserting my head and shoulders into the lower oven to see how the steak was, and so heard, rather than saw, the eager canine streak that flashed from beneath the kitchen table to the screen door, yelping in senseless joy, like Tarzan after the kill.

The pup had took it on himself to form a committee of one to welcome my husband, not that I cared any.

I heard Roy's smothered exclamation of surprise and delight, the soft scratching of his fingers on the dog's neck. I could almost hear the mutt writhe with ecstasy.

I withdrew my map from the hot oven and held my cheek for Roy's kiss as he come through the pantry door with the pup under one arm and the evening paper under the other. But instead of a sweet, warm osculation from my husband I received a wet, long lick from Buster.

Roy had put *him* up to my face instead. That's a man's idea of a good joke.

Something inside me seethed.

"Did you see the way that little tike rushed out to meet me?" chuckled Roy, ruffling the back of his playmate's neck.

"Looks as though he *wanted* me to come home, almost, don't it?"

"It's a good thing somebody wants you," I muttered.

"Did he have his bath?" went on Roy, undisturbed by my accents.

"Oh, yes," I simpered sweetly. "He had his nice bath, all right. With little wife's best facial soap and towel and violet water. The best is none too good for *your* friends, I'm sure."

"Good Lord," scowled Roy, sniffing the pup. "Is that awful smell coming from *him*? I thought it was you I whiffed. Perfume? Good night!"

"Oh, no," chortled I, really angry. "It's not *me* you whiff. I can only afford to use that high priced stuff on Christmas and birthdays. I ain't no pampered pet."

"Have you got a headache, dear, or something?" inquired Roy, gentle.

"Why?" I glowered.

"You seem a little snappy to-night."

"So's cheese," I muttered. "But that don't keep some people from liking it."

"Why, I like you, dear," said Roy, sweetly, and patted me, absent-minded, on the back.

I almost melted. If he had kissed me I would have. Gay again, I put the dinner on the table and set the steak in front of Roy with pride. Now to await his outburst of pleasure. None come.

Roy was looking down at Buster, parked by his chair and wearing a hopeful expression. He deliberately cut a piece of that high priced steak and dangled it in mid-air.

The pup gulped, hardly believing his eyes.

"Speak for it, boy," ordered Roy. "Speak, sir."

Buster yawned, still eying the meat as though it was hypnotizing him.

"Speak!" commanded Roy, more sternly. "Bark for it, boy."

The mutt give a sudden savage leap, but Roy jerked the meat from his jaws and dangled it still higher.

"Say bow wow, feller. Speak for it."

The dog finally made a thin squeak down at the back of his throat that you could hardly hear.

"That's right," said Roy, satisfied, delivering the steak to those willing jaws. "He spoke for it."

"I didn't hear him," I observed, sour.

"He did, though," insisted my husband, cutting off another fifteen cents' worth of the prize sirloin I had slaved over all afternoon. "Now, this time sit up for it, Buster. No, sit, not stand. Come on, now, sit up for it, sir. That's good—no, *sit*, not stand."

I snickered.

Roy flushed.

"Well, anyhow," he alibied, giving up the meat without further struggle, "he *stood* up for it. Anybody's dog could sit. This one is different, and besides it's a lot more difficult to stand than sit."

"Yeah. You'd discover that if you stood in the kitchen all day the way I do, getting meals."

"Are you tired to-night, hon?"

"Oh, yeah, to-night. But not the other three hundred and sixty-four days of the year. Never mind, I love it. I just love playing chef to a dog. Now, is there anything special he'd like for breakfast? Herring on toast with marmalade, maybe, or a chicken liver omelette with parsley?"

"What's eating you anyhow?" inquired my husband, puzzled.

"Oh, nothing," I chortled. "Nothing. In fact, the only thing that seems to be eating around here is that dog."

Roy delivered me a queer look, then bent his gaze to the pup who was watching him, steadfast.

"Ain't women funny, Buster?" he asked.

Buster curled his long pink tongue inside his mouth with a bored yawn. It seemed as if he was agreeing. In fact, the two of 'em were getting thicker than a day laborer's sandwich. As for me, I felt about as essential as a petticoat to a flapper.

Choking, I left the table.

II.

TIME toddled on.

Our little friend had become an established member of our happy home. Every day he would tag me, listless but dutiful, around the house, parking under the bu-

reau while I made the beds, tripping me up as I commuted from the kitchen stove to the ice box—following me with about as much affection as a sheriff does his prisoner.

But, oh boy, the change that took place in that canine when Roy's horn honked over the lots! No matter where he was, no matter what he was doing, at that clarion call he would jump to life like he'd been kissed by a bee and streak through to the back door to welcome his master.

Then, as I coolly went on curling my bob or basting the veal roast, I would hear wild demonstrations of mutual affection from the back porch that made little stabs prick through me—Roy's caressing murmurs, the pup's low whines of joy, the slow scratch of Roy's fingers along the flea-furrowed spine. Then the two of 'em would come through the kitchen where I toiled, the pup wriggling at Roy's feet like a harem dancer before the Sultan.

And Roy would address me very pleasant, and ask was Buster fed that noon, and on what, and didn't I think it was time he had another bath, and wasn't it cute the way Buster always came to meet him?

Sometimes Roy would kiss me, the kind of kiss you would hand your great-aunt Belinda as she arrived, bag and baggage, to spend a couple of months at your home. That kiss had about as much warmth in it as the English Channel in February. It chilled me down to the heart.

And always the hoot of that home-coming horn, and always that darn dog, running with his soul in his eyes to meet my husband at the door.

One day I couldn't bear it no more. It was beginning to get on my nerves. It irritated me like a sore tooth. You can stand it just so long, and then something's gotta be done.

At half past five, fifteen minutes before that home-coming horn would be honking its heraldry, I inveigled Buster to my clutch by means of an old soup bone. Grabbing him firmly by the scruff of the neck, I hauled him, wriggling and yelping, up the ladder to the attic.

This was nothing more or less than an air chamber that run the whole length of

our house, with a window front and back, making a cool breeze overhead in summer.

I planted Buster in the middle of this room and hastily backed down the ladder again. As I closed the trapdoor I seen that he had become interested in the geometry of a spider web and was perfectly at home. Chuckling, I resumed my work and waited for Roy.

I was almost devilish in my satisfaction at the thought of Roy's fruitless honking—of the absence of that crazy streak of joy that always rushed out to meet him.

It took me fifteen minutes to peel one potato. Abstracted, I looked out of the kitchen window, watching the western sky change colors like it was being painted by a temperamental artist who didn't know exactly what he wanted.

In the next yard stood the silent figure of my neighbor, gazing mournful at the rows of seed packets, all that yet showed for his spring planting. Upstairs I heard the aimless pattering of Buster's paws.

Where was Roy? Would he be late coming home to-day of all days?

But at five fifty sharp come his long announcing honk, the distant rattling of the left loose front fender. Another honk, inquiring, insistent.

Upstairs commenced a mad, frenzied scrambling, a running back and forth of frantic feet. Then another honk, stern, commanding.

I seen it—a tiny brown body hurtling through the air from the back upper window—a high, shrill scream as Buster went to meet his master—and his death.

I shut my eyes, suddenly sick. I heard the hasty banging of the car door as Roy leaped out—then his muttered sob. I kept on peeling a potato till there was nothing left of it, while the sunset blurred against my eyelids and my heart stood still.

Then I heard Roy's heavy tread as he went down the outside cellar steps—the sudden sharp ring of a shovel on the cement walk.

III.

It must have been almost an hour later when he finally come into the kitchen, his eyes somber with sorrow.

"Look—out there," he said, with a jerky nod of his head.

I went to the door and looked. By the tool house, in the shade where Buster always used to bury his left overs, fluttered a cardboard sign that read, "Here Lies the Bones of Buster."

On Roy's face was a terrible, twisty smile.

"But he met me at that," he said. "Nothing could stop *him*—coming."

He turned and retreated, choking, to the little room he called his den.

It was bedtime when he come out, calm now, with a relentless way of looking through me that chilled my heart.

"It's gonna turn cool to-night," he stated formally. "Guess I'll go down and stir up the furnace."

On the way he picked up the black sweater from beneath the kitchen table, and I never seen it again.

From the bathroom door he called out once that he wouldn't be needing breakfast in the morning. He had to get up early, and he would pick up something to eat down to the factory.

Numb, I sat in our little parlor, rocking. Finally he come beside me, wrapped close in his woolly old bath robe.

"Are you going to sit up awhile?" he inquired, pleasant. "Well, good night, then, Molly."

For a minute his hand lay on my shoulder, almost soothing. Then he wheeled and went. And when I at last tiptoed to our bedroom and switched on the light I found him sleeping, his face buried deep in the pillow.

All night I laid awake, still seeing his somber eyes bent on me in the dark, still hearing that patter of little paws overhead. And with morning come my decision.

There was only one thing left to do—go. When you have killed the one thing that is precious to somebody, you can't go on living with them, with their eyes steadfast on you—knowing eyes—accusing eyes.

It took me all day to pack, and on top of that I had to plan a cold supper to leave on the table for Roy when he come home. Where I was going I didn't know, having

no folks. I would merely let the big city swallow me up like a hippopotamus would a little liver pill. Whatever happened to me would be all right. There was nobody to care.

I had meant to leave long before Roy got home, but what with packing and getting his supper and all, it was a quarter to six when I jammed down the last full suitcase and buckled the strap.

Come a sudden honk over the back lots—Roy's honk, from force of habit. I almost expected to feel a sudden streak flash by me, out to meet him. Then I realized none would come.

Roy, too, would soon be realizing it. He had forgotten, I guess, that there was nobody now to meet him.

Nobody!

With a sudden resolution, and almost before I knew what I was doing, I was at the back door, rushing right into Roy's arms as he come in.

"Roy!" I sobbed. "Oh, Roy!"

Them arms tightened.

"Why, Molly!" he exclaimed, gentle and surprised.

I hugged him frantic, blubbing on his shoulder.

"You see—I—I come to meet you," I choked, inane.

"Yes, dear."

"Not that I could take *his* place," I added, lifting my head, stiff and proud again, "seeing as how you loved — him — more than—me."

Roy laughed, though there was a sob in his voice.

"You silly baby," he soothed. "Love that poor little mutt more than you, dear? I guess not. It was just"—here his voice became wistful—"just that I kind of wanted somebody to make a fuss over me. That's all."

Make a fuss over him!

Say, I learned my lesson. Men are all alike. They're only a bunch of babies grown up, and have got to have their petting.

Buster showed me the way.

THE END

An election takes place in which every nominee is a dead man—in "The Return of George Washington," by George F. Worts, starting in *Argosy-Allstory*, October 15th.



THE PROBLEM

IT lies on my desk like a flower,
A missive so dainty and blue,
Asking return of a photo,
And signed, "Yours forevermore, Sue."

Did she think, as she penned it, I wonder,
Of nights by a murmuring sea,
Or the joys of a magical summer
That letter would bring back to me?

She's going to marry, she tells me;
Her heart is a woman's—oh, quite!
Forgetting one man for another
Before the first's well out of sight.

Of course I shall heed her petition—
It is all I can decently do;
But—I collected five photos last summer,
And which to the devil is Sue?

Agnes Pearson.



The Sun Test

By **RICHARD BARRY**

Author of "The Big Gun," "Don Rando," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II

NEAR death, Tench McTier, formerly a sprinter of national reputation, resolves to live in the sun to save his life. He wanders in Mexico until a tribe of ancient Mayans, who have lingered on for centuries in a remote mountain fastness, capture him. The Mayans nurse Tench back to health, but not before he has fallen in love with their high priestess, Za, whom they believe to be the daughter of their god, the sun. At the Summer Festival races, Tench wins the sprints. Just as Za is about to award him his prize, a mountain lion stampedes the tribe. Only Tench is not afraid of the big cat. Za stays by him, and they go toward the village and get lost on the way and wander for hours while Tench tries to expound to the High Priestess his idea that she is really a white girl who fell into the hands of the Mayans when she was very young. But Za remains so aloof that Tench feels very discouraged.

CHAPTER XII.

FREE AGAIN.

ZA went on toward the village. Tench followed her, chastened and silent. They had proceeded but a very short distance when a middle-aged Mayan came toward them running, and prostrated himself on the ground in front of Za, crying out voluble protestations of relief and gladness that she had been found. Then he rose and trotted along at her side.

Soon another Mayan came running out of the forest, and another. Before Za reached the village, she was surrounded by a dozen or more fluttering brown figures, chattering happily.

Tench strode in the rear, moodily. Again he was separated from Za by this wave of primitive folk flowing between them. To his alert mind and active young body they seemed futile and foolish, and yet she was imprisoned among them more firmly than as if she were behind rock and steel.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 17.

They went on rapidly to the council chamber, and there the seven old men were waiting. Word was sped to them in advance of the discovery of the High Priestess, and of her safe return.

As she entered the chamber, they bowed reverently, and the chief addressed her, saying: "Welcome, Za! Your safe return from the jaws of the Evil One is a miracle. The great god, our father, the Sun, has returned you safely to his favorite Mayan children. The darkness of the wild beast has been prevailed against once more by the all-wise Sun, most powerful, most beautiful."

A chorus of praise and thanksgiving resounded from all the tribe which was assembled just outside the door. On the edge of the crowd, Tench McTier hung expectantly, thinking that any moment his guards would appear to seize him again.

Inside, Za was saying to the old men: "My life was saved by the white man, the stranger you rescued from the desert. He saved me from the lion. He conducted me down the face of the steep cliff. He watched over me through the night, so that the wild beasts and the snakes could not harm me. He led me back safely to my people."

"Where is he?" demanded the chief of the council. A call went through the crowd. Friendly hands began to push Tench toward the open door. A lane was made for him, and he was shoved slowly along. In a moment he stood inside the council chamber before the seven old men.

At the door his former guards kept out the members of the tribe, and inside stood Xlaco, beaming on him. All of the Mayans wore fatuous grins of approval and delight. To one side of the council, and removed from them, stood Za, the huitzin drawn closely about her, looking at him aloofly.

"Stranger," said the chief of the council, in his thin, aged voice, in which there was a tremor of emotion, for it quavered as he spoke. "The great god has sent you to us. He has tried you. On equal terms with our young men, you have been shown to be the fleetest of foot among them all, a surpassing conqueror.

"Then confronted by the evil one, Satan

himself, in the form of a wild lion, you have shown courage above all others. The privilege has been accorded you by the great god himself of saving the mortal life of his daughter, the Priestess, Za.

"Therefore, you are to be received among us as a true child of Maya, a son of the Sun, and a priest of Za. Advance, kneel and receive the symbol of your rank and condition."

Tench went forward, came down to one knee before the chief of the council, and inclined his head slightly. The old man took from a bench at his rear a thong of rawhide, in the center of which hung a single yellow jewel, about the size of a small pea. This he placed over the head of the white man.

"I christen thee 'Xtla.' By the sign of this jewel you are taken to the bosom of Maya, and are henceforth one with the true children of the Sun."

Even as Tench rose and looked about, Za was departing through the door of the council chamber. He saw only the scintillant, pasteled back of the huitzin. With an effort he controlled an impulse to speak to her and to go after her.

All eyes were upon him, and instinctively he realized that it would be dangerous to reveal any of his mortal longing. The glances, however, were all most friendly and most admiring. Evidently he had completely captured the Mayans.

His prowess in the race, and his imperturbability at the appearance of the puma had made him in their eyes a hero.

However, there was one obscure exception, of which he was only dimly aware. As he turned to leave the chamber he felt concentrated on him a sinister glance from one of the youths in the crowd. For a second his look met that of his chief rival in the race of the afternoon before, Huasco. There was a fleeting clash of glance.

In that second a spark seemed to kindle between them. It was a spark of antagonism which only accentuated the wave of love and admiration which flowed toward him from all others of the tribe.

Xlaco came forward glowingly. "Xtla," he said, "you are free now, a Mayan! Command your servant."

Tench passed an arm around the kindly, bent old shoulders. "You have been my friend. May it always be so. I will need you; for I am ignorant, and I would be a good Mayan. Accept me as your son and teach me in the way I should go."

Xlaco grinned with delight. "I am honored," he murmured. "Come with me," and he led the way along the street toward the stone hut Tench had occupied. The two former guards half started to their feet, but Xlaco frowned upon them and exclaimed "Go, you, about your business. He is free now, a Mayan. My son, Xtla, a Priest of Za."

Most of that day Tench spent in the company of his adopted father, Xlaco, gleaning from him what he could of Mayan lore. He learned that his new name, Xtla, meant "fleet one," that it was a name revered in the tribe above all others, except that of Za, and was held in each generation by the fastest runner.

The former Xtla had died only a few months before, and the races just run had been held partly for the purpose of selecting his successor. It was the custom usually to name the winner of the distance race as Xtla, for sprinting did not rank among the Mayans as so great an accomplishment as distance running.

However the advent of the puma the afternoon before had dispersed the distance runners, and the long race had not been officially finished; as yet it had no winner. Therefore Tench, in the judgment of the elders, stood forth among all of the youths as the fleetest of foot.

This accidental circumstance, combined with his fortitude before the lion, and the rescue of Za, had given the council no choice. They had elected him as Xtla, the fleet one.

He would remain Xtla until some untoward act of his own, or death, intervened to deprive him of the first honor in the tribe, which the name indicated. There would be other races, and other years, but in none of them would he be expected to participate, and while he held the title of Xtla none other could achieve it.

Tench asked about Huasco, his nearest competitor. Xlaco's wrinkled face cloud-

ed. "Spawn of the Evil One," he muttered.

"He ran well. His nose was at my shoulder," Tench observed.

"God was testing you," Xlaco grumbled. "Huasco has the look of Satan."

"To-day," Tench went on, "his seemed the only face that was not pleased. I saw him look daggers at me as I left the council chamber."

"He is not a Mayan," Xlaco said this with his face partly averted, as if admitting a shameful and distressing fact.

"Not Mayan!" Tench echoed. "How can that be?"

"Huasco's mother," Xlaco explained, "was the loveliest of the Mayan maidens in the year of the spring dance when she came forward as a virgin. She was chosen by the council to be the bride of the finest of the Mayan youths of that year. The night when she was to be mated, she disappeared.

"She went from her home no one knew where. For long it was thought that she had been lost in the jungle. It was said that a lion had seized and devoured her, and she was given up as a pitiful prey to the Evil One.

"Another maiden was allotted to the young man who was to have been her mate, and a burial prayer was said over her name. A year elapsed, and then one day, down by the steam baths, we found her, tired and hungry, alone, with a baby in her arms.

"She would not say where she had been. She would not disclose who had taken her, or whether she had gone of her own free will. She would not say who was the father of her child. She seemed all but demented.

"Before the council could try her for desertion and disobedience to our law of mating, she died. This child, her boy, grew up and became Huasco."

"Oh," said Tench.

Xlaco paid no attention to this remark, but went on: "It is the Mayan law that no life may be taken by man. The Sun alone can command life or death. The Sun acts through his own handmaidens, fire and water, to give or take life from man and beast.

"Each spring when the rains are at their

height and the stream rushes down the arroyo, it is the Mayan custom for the mothers to take their young children to the edge of the water, and to throw them in. If they are strong, they swim and live, reaching the bank safely. Thus they grow up to be good Mayans.

"If they are weak, they die, drowned in the swift waters. It is good for the tribe to be spared caring for lives that are not intended to be fit. This is the water test performed by the great handmaiden of the Sun each spring.

"That spring in the water test, Huasco was thrown into the raging stream in the arroyo by the chief of the council himself. He had no father, no mother. It was expected that he would sink and be at once drowned, and that thus the tribe would be spared the ignominy of raising to manhood one who had come into life in defiance of its laws.

"But no. The tiny Huasco no sooner hit the freshet than his lusty arms and legs struck out like a bullfrog under a whip. He spurned the rushing waters. He swam them as steadily and easily as a kingfish.

"Soon he scrambled up the bank and began crowing lustily, as though to announce to the council that he was a Mayan, true and tried. There was nothing to do under the law but to accept him, to raise him, and to take him into the tribe as a member with all privileges and powers."

"A sturdy physique and a strong heart," said Tench. "I thought for a moment yesterday in the race that he had me. He was not easy to defeat."

The old eyes of Xlaco glowed feelingly. "It was the fear of all that Huasco would win the short race yesterday," he continued. "Among the juniors there is none to equal him. He wanted to enter the long race, but the members of the council ruled that his age fortunately did not permit that for another year.

"As the winner of the long race would be the successor of the Xtla, just dead, and as he would doubtless live for at least another year, thus the tribe would be spared having Huasco as its Xtla. So, you see, my son, what a blessing your coming has proved to be to the Mayans.

"It is believed among the women that Huasco was sired by the spirit of the evil one himself. Others among us believe that his mother was seized by a wandering Aztec from the tribe which lives far beyond the hills on the other side of the great mesas, and that he was the father of her child. If you will observe, you will see that he has a very high cheekbone, which is not like a Mayan.

"You must know that the Mayans are of the pure strain, the ancient lineage going back to the origin of the Sun himself. Countless generations before the coming of the Aztecs, the Mayans inhabited this land. They owned it and loved it, and dwelled here in peace.

"Then came the savage conqueror, the Aztec, who seized our lands and destroyed our temples, drove us from the cities, and dispersed us into the wilds, until this small, select remnant of the Mayans found shelter under this rocky cliff in the presence of the steam baths. Here we have lived unmolested by the Aztecs because they do not know where to find us.

"In time the Aztec also was conquered and destroyed. It is the law of life. Those who live by conquest shall perish by conquest. The Aztecs, too, are now hunted and hidden, but of a race not as old as the Mayans, and not blessed by the Sun, a savage race."

"They are what we call Indians," Tench observed. "They have red skin and came, perhaps, originally from lands far across the western ocean."

"Aye," said Xlaco, "while the Mayans are white, coming very far from the south, out of the finest lands of the Sun god."

As Tench reflected on the story of Huasco, he perceived that in this active tribesman he must solve his chief menace. He felt something in the attitude and in the glance of the virile, dark young man that was not as respectful toward Za as was the reverence felt by all the other Mayans.

He realized that it was different even from his own attitude. His, indeed, was human in its longing, but still respectful, hallowed by love. In the mere glance of Huasco toward her there was something sinister, and savage.

Was it the inherited wildness that had descended to him through his unknown predatory sire?

CHAPTER XIII.

TREACHERY.

TENCH McTIER was a Mayan, but in name only. He looked upon the tribe as the oysters of the human race. By denying themselves all the ideas and desires which rendered life attractive to the average American, they had been able to exist for centuries without any change.

From an ethnic point of view, they were doubtless degenerates; the law of life is that if you do not advance, you must go backward. They had not advanced. They had tried to stand still.

Therefore, despite themselves, despite most unexampled heroisms of self control, and of a timid denial of many human instincts, they had gone backward, slowly, inevitably. Intellectually and sociologically, they were living in the very dawn of the race's activity. Now that he had regained his health and his freedom, Tench felt that there was nothing to hold him among them, existing on pounded maize, sunning himself month in and month out, in the manner of a lizard.

Nothing, that is, but Za—Za, with her yellow hair, and youthful bloom, and her persistent idolatry of the sun, ignorant, superstitious, but lovely and fascinating. He had committed himself to breaking down the barriers that separated them.

But for a few days after he had been accepted as a priest of Za, and when he felt that the roads up over the mesa were open to him to go when and where he chose, memories of other days began to crowd upon him, and a longing to again show himself in his old haunts, well and strong, became imperative.

Why should he linger with these exotic degenerates and trifle longer with their absurd outworn beliefs? Why should he not take the trail at once that led to the north, and push on over the mesa and through the desert until he came again to the haunts of men like himself?

This impulse was not as robust as he imagined, however. He began to recall tales he had heard of white men highly cultured, even like himself, being lost in the wilds of Africa with primitive folk no more developed than were men in the dawn of history, or in the depths of Asia, or beyond the Arctic Circle with Eskimos, who were content to live their lives under these conditions so far removed from modern ken.

Was there an intense primitive urge in the heart of man luring him ever backward along the trail? Was it like some overpowering drug that lulled the senses to sleep?

From day to day he debated thus with himself, part of the time resolving to run away from the Mayans and return to civilization but all the time held to them by the thrall of the tropics, the lure of the primitive, and a longing again to see Za, a longing that grew upon him like a subtle fever.

He would wake at night suddenly with an overwhelming consciousness that she was beside him and that her tiny palm lay softly in his, only to find he was alone, and to be seized with a baffling longing to talk to her again.

He dared not confide in Xlaco. He dared make no move toward Za's pueblo which would indicate to the Mayans how unlike theirs was his love for her.

One day Xlaco said to him: "To-morrow, we go to the mine."

"What mine?" asked Tench.

"The mine of the Sun's windows. Once each year for one day, all men of the tribe work the mine."

Tench touched the yellow jewel which hung in the leather guard about his neck.

"You intend to get more like this?" he asked.

"Aye," said Xlaco. "We must be ready early."

The Mayans started the next morning before dawn, just as they had started on the day of the races. This time, however, they took a direction along the base of the cliff.

At their head marched Za, robed in the huitzin. Following her came the seven members of the council, the oldest men of the tribe.

Then came the Priests of Za including

Tench or Xtla, as they all knew and called him. Practically every male of mature age and of good health was a Priest of Za. Each wore round his throat a leather thong containing a single jewel.

After a walk of about three miles they came to a hole in the side of a mountain. It was about twelve feet square and shored with the trunks of small trees, evidently the entrance to the mine, but concealed from the casual passer-by by the branches of a huge oak tree which hung down over it like a screen. At the distance of only a few feet the aperture could not be detected.

When they reached the mine it was broad daylight. The members of the council went to a near-by mound of earth and rummaged among some fallen dried oak leaves. They disclosed a pile of sharpened oak staves, the ends charred and toughened by fire. These they passed around among the Priests of Za, one to each.

By this time the sun was up, and the light excellent. At a signal from the chief of the council all bowed their heads. Za raised her hands and uttered a prayer, and then the Priests passed through the entrance to the mine, and disappeared inside.

Tench was in their midst and as he passed out of the daylight he felt a familiar figure pressing along at his side. He turned and confronted the cool, dark glances of Huasco.

"The fleet one prospers," muttered Huasco, with a sneer.

Tench ignored the inflection in the other's voice, and replied good-naturedly: "I am well thank you, Huasco, and you?"

For answer Huasco impudently flipped his thumb under the jewel in the leather thong about Tench's neck. "I am not yet a Priest of Za." He touched a leather thong around his own neck. It bore no jewel, indicating that he was a Neophyte, a candidate for the priesthood, but not yet accepted. "It is a bad day for good Mayans when a heathen stranger can be given a Sun-window in preference to our own people."

"I am sorry you feel that way," Tench replied, striving to ignore the insolence in the other's manner. "I would prefer to be friendly with you, Huasco, if you will make it possible."

The dark face came menacingly near to his. "A Mayan cannot be friendly with one who wanders through the night with the Priestess, Za."

Tench flushed with the inference in the tone, rather than with the words. "Wh-what d-do you m-mean?" he stammered.

Huasco chuckled malevolently. "You were seen that night," he went on in a low whisper, his mouth close to Tench's ear. "It is known that you have not for the Priestess the true worship. Beware! One more false step from you and the council will be notified of your unorthodox ideas about the High Priestess Za."

Tench partially recovered himself. He believed that Huasco was bluffing, but if so, the Aztec had an uncanny intuition of Tench's feelings, and was taking advantage of them. Tench did not believe that he had revealed his own trepidation in the darkness of the mine.

He responded firmly: "I will look after myself, Huasco. You look after yourself. Let us both be good Mayans—and friends."

He held up his hand in the fashion he had observed in the tribe as indicating friendliness. Instead of responding by raising his hand, Huasco spat upon the ground. It was a mark of personal defiance, a deadly insult, although Tench did not thoroughly comprehend it.

Za, who had been standing near the mouth of the mine, had been observing the tenseness between the two. She was perturbed. She stepped forward and addressed them.

"Huasco! Xlta! You should be at work. The day is advancing. The hours of labor are short."

Tench turned upon her, his face beaming with friendliness. She answered smile with smile. But when Huasco looked toward her, she faced him down stonily until his glance fell. He seized his sharp stick, and withdrew to his work. In a moment Tench followed him.

The mine channel went back several hundred feet into a hill. The Mayans worked there with their sticks and their hands. The ground was a combination of soft stone and earth. The stone crumbled under the least blow, and even between the fingers. The

jewels were found in clefts of the stone, packed about by the earth.

The procedure was to bring out earth by the handful to the mouth of the mine and there to examine it bit by bit under the inspection of the members of the council. If a jewel was found, it was passed over to the old men at once. The winnowed earth was thrown into a refuse pile at the side.

Xlaco had explained to Tench that it was unlawful for any Mayan to have in his possession one of the jewels, except as it was given to him for use as an insignia by the council. It would be extremely difficult for any of them to conceal a jewel, as none of them wore much clothing.

Moreover, it was difficult to imagine what could be the object in retaining a jewel, when it would have no value for trade, and could not be worn in personal adornment without the approval of the council.

Tench was busily engaged with his stick in prying loose pieces of soft rock, when he noticed that Huasco, who was not far away, was concealing something in the scant fold of the fiber stretched round his waist. He stopped to observe more carefully, for the light was very dim and Huasco looked up to detect him watching. An angry exclamation escaped the Aztec.

Tench returned to his work. The rock was stubborn. He tugged and wrenched it out. Then suddenly it seemed the earth was rent asunder. Before he could realize what had happened he was pinned to the earth by a cave-in.

The tree trunk which shored in the roof of the mine above him had given way and had fallen across his shoulders, followed by half a ton of dirt. He did not know that the crafty Huasco had loosened the supports while his back was turned.

Cries for help resounded through the mine. The Mayans came running. It was seen that Tench's head was free, and he was living, and could breathe. Meanwhile the strongest of them bent sturdily to the task of propping up the timber which pinned him down.

Ingenuously, with wedges of sharp stone which they drove in one above the other, they jacked up the timber until it rose free

above him the space of several inches. Then they began digging away the earth behind. After half an hour, they managed to pull him out. He was carried to the mouth of the mine, and laid on his back on the green sward.

Xlaco ran to a spring at the base of the hill, and came back with a gourd of water. The old men of the council stood about solicitously. There was relief in their eyes when they saw that Tench was able to raise his hands and help himself to the water, although his body was bruised with rock, and his face covered with dirt.

Za pushed her way through the ring of old men and came swiftly to his side, on her knees. She placed an arm under his head, and began bathing his face with water from the gourd. For the moment at least, she was no longer aloof.

Under this delightful ministrations Tench subsided, closed his eyes and breathed happily, sighing with content. Softly she stroked his face, and felt swiftly of his chest to see that it was whole and sound, bending her ear close to his chest to listen to his breathing and feeling his pulse.

Meanwhile she murmured: "Xtla! Xtla! Do not die; the Sun has need of you. You must live. Open your eyes. Look at me. Say that you are not dead."

With a dreamy, happy smile, he half opened his eyes, and spoke softly so that only she could hear: "Za, my love," he murmured. "You have answered me. I will live, but only for you."

She rose precipitately, dropping his head to the green sward without consistent care. "He is not badly hurt," she said to the seven old chiefs. "The Sun has spared him."

When Tench sat up a moment later and looked for her, she was gone. She had withdrawn to a distant hillock, apparently to regain her composure.

The Mayans found thirty-one jewels that day for the old men to treasure. As night fell and they trudged back along the trail to the village, Huasco fell in step with Tench. "It is not well for one to have a secret with the daughter of the Sun," he said. "For each Mayan who has attempted that there has always been the

penal chamber, and the swift judgment of the Sun."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE PENAL CHAMBER.

TENCH had heard so much about the penal chamber that he wanted to see it. However, he had learned one thing since the council had accepted him as a full-fledged Mayan. He was not expected to ask questions.

Being a Mayan, it was presumed that he knew everything Mayan. While he had been under guard, on probation, he had been able to cross-question Xlaco, but now the old man did not encourage him to ask questions.

A few days after the accident at the mine, and when he had fully recovered from his slight bruises, he said to Xlaco: "I do not see in the village the place where the wicked are kept."

Xlaco was startled, and looked at his adopted son askance. "May you never know it!" he exclaimed.

"But it is well for a man to know all things," Tench insisted. "When I am with my people, I always like to see the jail."

"The Mayans are your people," Xlaco reproved him, "and it is not well for a good Mayan ever to see the penal chamber. That which is not known does no harm."

Tench was more tactful, as he replied: "We Mayans are told that if we do not behave we will be sent to the penal chamber. Is it not good therefore to know just what it is, so that we may be more eager to avoid it?"

Xlaco raised his hands protestingly. "The Sun god forbid!" His lips were sealed on the subject henceforth.

During the conversation, however, Tench had observed that once or twice Xlaco had glanced instinctively toward the south into the jungle. It was the direction in which Tench had not traveled.

The cliffs and the mesa were toward the north, the mine toward the east, and the rocky glen in the west. Tench shrewdly concluded that the penal chamber lay toward the south. He said no more at the

moment, but resolved to make an exploration of his own at the first opportunity.

Before dawn of the following day he was up and off into the jungle. He felt that he had investigated the Mayans rather thoroughly. He knew their method of government through the council. He had seen their system of mating in the dance of the maidens. He had participated in the annual games and in the annual mining for their precious stones.

A little later, when the summer was at its height, they would snare humming birds so that they might save the select breast feathers for the further embellishment of the huitzin. The water test he could not observe until the next spring when the stream would be in flood.

The greatest mystery of all was the Sun test. That he hoped to witness some day, little dreaming in what poignant manner this knowledge would come to him. The only unsolved feature of the Mayan life which was at his hand to probe was the penal chamber, and his active young mind could not wait longer to delve into it.

As he left the village and entered the jungle, the way was unmistakable. Along a well-worn path under the spreading oaks and through the gnarled sycamores, skirting thickets of greasewood, dodging the eccentric Joshua trees, he passed for the better part of a mile until suddenly he came to a broad ledge of rock.

The undergrowth had been cleared away for fifty yards in every direction. Unsuspecting, he walked on the ledge, and halted as he came to its further lip.

He looked down on a spectacle that disgusted him. It lay at his feet, a rocky bowl about the size of a sprawling six-room bungalow. Along the sides of its bottom they had scooped out seven or eight tiny caves.

Most of them appeared to be shallow, affording shelter for no more than a good-sized bear. In them sprawled several specimens of woebegone humanity, dirty and listless, barely alive. The stench from the place ascended revoltingly. It was a fetid spot in a clean jungle.

The especially distinguishing feature of the Mayan life, as Tench had seen it, was

their devotion to the natural steam baths. He had always heard that primitive people were dirty, but the Mayans were a delightful exception to this rule. Now, however, he looked upon human squalor in its lowest form.

There was no outlet from this rocky chamber. The pitiful creatures, condemned to exist there, had only the sun for a curative agent, and evidently in the heat of the day, that must be a terrific trial to them, for the shade of the shallow caves was trifling and there seemed no way for a breath of fresh air to get down into the narrow bowl.

Overcome with the sight, Tench sat down on the edge of the bowl to recover his composure. There was a sluggish stirring among some of the sprawling forms in the bottom of the chamber. A movement from him caught the attention of one of them, and he passed some word to the others.

They began looking up dully toward Tench. They were evidently too haggard and depressed to care who he was, or what his presence there might mean.

After a few minutes the occupant of the largest of the caves crawled out in the sun. He was different from any of the others. He wore a pair of ragged pants, and the remnant of a blue flannel shirt. None of the others had any clothing. Also he was of larger size than the others, and had long black whiskers.

The Mayan men were not very hirsute. They grew sparse, little tufts of wispy hair on their chins, and Tench had never seen one with a full-fledged beard.

The individual he now looked on, however, had an unkempt black beard that fell to his chest, and matted, tousled, black hair. Moreover, there was something familiar about him. Tench peered at him with avid curiosity.

The prisoner, for such he surely must be, rose to his feet awkwardly, stretching himself, and came across the chamber to the foot of the wall, on top of which sat Tench.

"Howdy, pard," he called, in good old American plains language.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" Tench gasped. It was the desperado who had stolen his

chuck and Fa Ro, months before, back on the desert.

"Ye sure will be jiggered if they plunk ye in here. Better keep back off the edge of that rock. It's slippery. Ye don't want to fall in this dump, kid," the black-whiskered one cheerily admonished. Then he pointed toward the rear of the ledge. "Git that ladder and drop 'er down, will ye?"

Tench looked back of him and saw a rope ladder made of plantain fiber, but he did not move toward it. He had no intention of upsetting the penal system of the Mayans, or of starting a jail delivery on such quick notice.

"Git a move on, kid," urged the robber. "This is the day these Injuns come round fer a 'look see.' Hurry and beat 'em to it."

Tench propped himself with his hands securely, and replied stolidly: "I've seen you before."

"Like's not," said the black-haired one. "How'd you git here 'thout bein' cotched?"

Tench continued sternly: "Aren't you the thief who stole my donkey and provisions?"

"Huh?" grunted the one below, as he peered more closely, his eyes growing larger in wonder. "Ye ain't the lunger I borried off'n, be ye?"

"Borrowed at the end of a six-gun," Tench corrected.

The desperado laughed. "Wa-al, partner, might as well let bygones be bygones. We're a couple of whites out with black Injuns like this. 'Tain't no time to stand on property rights. I borried and I'll pay ye back, so there!

"Take it straight from Black Pete, I ain't never broke my word yet with a pal in the same stir. You get me out of this here rattlesnake's den, and I'll show ye the way out of this Injun tribe, and line your pockets with good rich loot to boot."

Tench had no intention of combining with the thief who had so cruelly robbed him of his donkey and his provisions, leaving him to die desperately in the desert; yet Black Pete was a white man, and the only definite link he had with the civilization which seemed so infinitely distant. Besides, there might be information to be had.

"How did they get you, Pete?" he asked, forcing a smile.

"Cotched me in a kind of net, the dang, sneakin' varmints. They're a pest like a horned toad. Ye don't know they can sting ye till you step on 'em in the dark."

"Didn't you know you were in their country?"

"You bet. I come lookin' for 'em. Old blind McNary, a prospector in the Panamints, tole me all 'bout these here Mayans year afore last, when he was dyin'. Tole me 'bout the mine they had and the precious jewels wuth more'n gold, di'monds he said."

"Diamonds!" ejaculated Tench. He felt of the leather thong about his neck. It had worked round so that the "Sun's Window" was at the back and could not be seen from below.

"You bet. Di'monds big as a hen's egg, wuth more'n gold nuggets. Yaller, too, and a yaller di'mond is wuth more'n a white di'mond. Scarcer'n bowlegged frogs in a toad puddle. A hat full of 'em 'll put a guy on easy street for keeps, and they're right here, too, kid. These Injuns has got plenty of 'em.

"They flings 'em round like they was pebbles on the beach, and they ain't got no six-guns, nor bows and arrows neither. If it weren't for their danged nets, tappin' their till w'ud be a job for a stool-pigeon.

"You git me out of here and I'll show ye the way. They won't never git Black Pete no more. Git a move on. Shove that ladder down, and I'll split with you, fifty-fifty."

"Nets, you say," queried Tench. "What kind of nets?"

"How could I see?" Black Pete growled. "Fust I knew, thar I was trussed up like a padri'ge on a bastin' fork. They ain't human, them Injuns, like a Ute, or a Pache, or a Crow. I've lived with Injuns all my life and fit 'em off and on, too, but these here Mayans are tarnal devils.

"They ain't proper Injuns 'tall. They're just a kinda grown up louse. If it weren't for them yaller di'monds I'd never want to see 'em again nohow.

"Look at these jail-birds here," Pete waved an arm derisively to include the five or six wretched, diminutive Mayans who had gathered about him, and who were look-

ing up dumbly and ignorantly with beady little pig eyes, while the colloquy between the two white men was going on in a tone and language quite foreign to their understanding.

Tench ignored the robber for the moment, and spoke in Mayan to the nearest inmate of the chamber.

"What are you there for?" he asked.

The forlorn Mayan answered dully: "I did not go to the baths. I am here for half a year."

"And you?" Tench addressed another.

"For eating a rabbit," confessed the second Mayan.

"You?" he asked the third.

"Because I would not marry. I don't want children to be thrown into running water."

The others were there for other infractions of the Mayan code, one for consuming the entire family ration of maize, another for cheating in the distance-running race, another for failing to bow and pray in the presence of Za.

Pete's mouth fell open in amazement when he heard Tench converse with the Mayans in their own tongue.

"You savvy the lingo, eh, kid?" he interjected.

"Yes, I am a Mayan," Tench responded solemnly.

Pete roared in laughter. "Can that stuff! A red-blooded he-American like you tied up to these dirty lice? It's a joke. 'Specially now that you look like a fust-class gun-toter. When I fust peeped ye out thar on the desert, ye was nothin' more'n a ghost. But ye come back, kid, ye sure come back. Does me good to look at ye. Seein' as ye're a white man and me down hyear in this fry-in' hole with these squirmen' hell devils, why don't ye git a move on, and toss that ladder in?"

"Wait a minute," Tench countered. "Do you think you know the way out of this country?"

"You bet."

"It's tricky. Which way first?"

Pete laughed as if at a marvelous witticism. "Don't know as I could tell ye 'zactly, but pull me out of this and I'll show you. 'Guess there ain't no white man south

of the Rockies except Black Pete could ever git ye out of here alive."

"The High Priestess ought to know," Tench offered, to see what the robber would say.

"Ye mean the white gal that runs this gang?"

"I mean Za, the daughter of the Sun."

"The sun, my eye!" Pete cackled. "She is the daughter of ol' man McCarthy that blazed the timbers into the Blue Star Mine south of Tonopah."

Tench breathed very deeply as he heard this. He was well prepared to believe what the wayward desperado might tell him and with difficulty he concealed his eagerness. He shrugged his shoulders in affected derision, and responded dryly: "The heat has made you loco, Pete."

"Loco, me foot," the black-whiskered one vehemently went on. "Ain't her picture been in the police circulars every year for the last eighteen year alongside of mine?"

"For eighteen years?" Tench queried. "Why, Za is not more than eighteen now, and she has never known anything but life among the Mayans."

"Mought be, but eighteen year ago she was two year old and some one stole her outa ol' man McCarthy's shanty in Tonopah, the very week McCarthy made a strike. He's had a standing offer of twenty thousand dollars reward for her return, dead or alive ever since."

"If her picture was in the police circulars, then it must have been that of a baby," commented Tench.

"You bet but a baby with yaller hair and blue eyes and white skin, just like this hyear Za. O' course, it moughtn't be, but I got a hunch it is. Anyway we can cop her, and bring her back to ol' man McCarthy, and claim the reward. They's one thing dead sure that gal's no Mayan."

"I don't think she would leave these people," Tench said, as if partly to himself.

"Grab 'er, take 'er, kidnap 'er. It's wuth a chance at twenty thousand, ain't it? Leastwise a fly kid like you oughta find her pretty sweet company on the way back."

"I'm afraid, Pete, that before you affected your purpose, she would have you arrest-

ed and tried for a more serious crime than the one you are probably in here for."

"Holy snakes kid," the robber yelled, "I'm in here for crime enough as it is. If I don't beat it from here chop, chop, they're going to fry me in the sun, and as for that yaller-haired gal, I ain't got so much use for her. She's nothin' but a damned snob. I knew her quick enough when I seen her, with her picture alongside of me for eighteen year. But did she know me? Not on your tintype."

CHAPTER XV.

"UP TO" THE SUN.

TENCH was eager to learn much more. How had Black Pete had an opportunity to see Za? Had he been able to converse with her? Were there any distinguishing marks beyond her yellow hair and blue eyes that had been noted in the police circular?

If a child had been stolen from one McCarthy, near Tonopah, Nevada, how had she been taken fifteen hundred or two thousand miles south into the land of the Mayans? Most important of all, had Black Pete conveyed to Za this theory of her origin, or was it because of this that he had been placed in the penal chamber?

He had no chance to ask any of these questions, for even as the desperado was telling him about the picture of the lost baby, he heard the oak leaves crackling back along the trail, and he knew that some one was coming from the direction of the village.

Although he had not been told that it was unlawful to gaze upon the penal chamber, still he had no desire to be detected. Even if what he was doing was regarded as harmless he wanted to preserve the chance to come back to it and renew the querying of Black Pete.

Therefore, with a hasty, soft call to the desperado that some one was coming, and that he must go for awhile, he hastened from the rocky lip, and soon was on the south side of the chamber, in the jungle.

A few hundred yards away he stopped. A live oak with many enormous boles of-

ferred a convenient hiding place and lookout. He climbed up one of the boles, and spread himself full out. Through the spreading leaves he could see into the chamber and beyond, to the rocky lip.

In a moment there appeared Xlaco and six guards. Each of the guards bore in his hand a little coil of plantain rope. One of them dropped the ladder over the edge of the bowl, leaving its end attached to an old stump. The miserable creatures in the bottom of the bowl rushed eagerly for it, and fought one another for the chance to touch it first.

Xlaco stood at the top of the ladder and uncoiled from his waist a sort of riata which in his hands seethed and coiled above their heads with angry swiftness. Meanwhile the old man called out sternly to the Mayans to stand back. They cowered away and crouched in the corners of the bowl under the menace of his words, backed up by the seething whip.

Only Black Pete stood his ground. He advanced to the ladder and took hold firmly of the lower rungs. Of this evidently Xlaco approved, for he pulled up his riata, and beckoned to Pete to ascend.

The desperado climbed with alacrity, while two of the guards stood to receive him. No sooner were his shoulders above the ledge than they threw withes of plantain about him. In a moment he lay writhing on the rock, bound securely and cursing horribly.

They placed a stick behind his back and bound his arms round it, his hands being firmly lashed across his stomach. Then Xlaco cracked his riata. The guards prodded Black Pete and one of them led the way back along the trail. Pete followed and the others closed in, Xlaco the last.

Tench did not wait very long before he, too, was on the trail toward the village. When he regained his hut it was mid forenoon. It was plain something was astir. The men were on the streets, garbed as for a festival, with their Sun Windows in place with their hair greased, and slickly laid down.

Women could be seen preparing their children as they did on occasional days when they left their houses. They placed

them in rough cradles which were no more than bits of tree trunk hollowed out.

These were placed in the doorways, and the babies lashed in them so that they could not get away. All children old enough to walk about easily always accompanied their mothers.

In a short time all the tribe, men, women, and children, except those in the cradles, were assembled in the streets, waiting and casting inquiring glances from time to time toward the doorway of the council room, where two guards squatted on their haunches, indicating that the council was in session inside.

Presently the guards rose and stood at attention. The members of the council filed out one by one. Each wore his full regalia of yellow jewels. The chief was robed in his semi-huitzin. Tench could see in their manner and in the awed look on the faces of the members of the tribe, that this was a most solemn occasion.

Then out of the hut came Black Pete, still bound and being hustled along by watchful guards. Every few moments he cursed volubly, but as his curses were not understood, and plainly were having no effect, he gradually lost his pep.

The members of the council went on up the street, and out on the trail toward the mine. The prisoner was close behind, and after him, the members of the tribe fell in, in ragged procession. Half a mile from the village, they turned to the right, and a little farther on defiled into a recess formed by adjoining mounds, or buttes.

When Tench entered this recess with the other members of the tribe, he was astonished to discover a natural amphitheater, almost circular, and probably a thousand feet across in each direction. Around all sides the natural rock had been terraced into seats, and on these the members of the tribe were gathering, and turning to face the center of the stadium or whatever it might be called.

It looked very much like a primitive theater; for in its center was a raised platform or stage, which was reached by three steps. In the center of this stage was a stone slab about eight feet long and three feet wide.

As Tench took his seat, the members of

the council were standing, three on each side of the stone slab with the chief at its foot. At the head stood Za in full regalia of jewels and huitzin.

Her complexion seemed more brilliant than he had ever seen it before, and on a second look he discovered that her cheeks and lips had been painted with vermilion. The tips of her fingers also, and her toes were similarly rouged. It added a fiery note of ornate splendor to the scene in which she was the most brilliant figure.

The guards had Black Pete by the side of the stone slab. From the opposite side facile hands swiftly spread on top of the stone, layer after layer of dried twigs, brittle as punk. On top of these transversely were laid a dozen dried tree branches. Over them were then sprinkled handful after handful of dried grass until a couch was formed with its top just above a man's waist.

The chief nodded and four of the guards seized Black Pete, one at each limb, and lifted him on to this couch where he lay sprawling and struggling on his back while they lashed him down securely, leaving nothing free but his head.

Tench was now horribly fascinated. The meaning of the wooden couch on top of the stone slab with its sinister dried grass dawned on him. Was it a pyre? Was he about to witness the burning of a human being?

He was afflicted with a sick dread of what appeared to be about to happen, and he began to cast around in his mind for some way to prevent it, but the event rolled on so swiftly that he was spellbound, and it was practically over before he realized how it happened, or even fully that it was going to happen.

He saw the chief sprinkle from a gourd at his waist some grains of what looked like powder, along the edge of the stone slab. He saw another place at the head of the slab a piece of rock. Then he saw Za take from her breast the largest of the jewels, detach it from its leather holdings and place it on top of the small rock.

She then raised her hands upward and looked full-eyed into the sun, while she uttered a prayer, which he could only hear

indistinctly, so fearful was he of what was to come, and so wild was his desire to discover some way to prevent it.

It was now high noon, the sun was at his zenith, directly overhead, and in the full force of late June. Its rays were vertical and all powerful.

Tench sat as if stunned and in what seemed to him a mere second of time although perhaps minutes elapsed, he saw a thin wisp of smoke come from beneath the small rock which held the polished jewel. A moment later a tiny flame spread to the dried grass. The day was dead and still. The grass was like tinder. It crackled into flame almost instantly. The flame spread to the dried branches, and in a moment the pyre was alight and blazing.

The whole tribe looked on silent, awed, but devouring the spectacle with religious, savage glee. They were suffering vicariously with the already burning flesh of the white criminal, and this suffering was part of their sincere devotion to their god.

Cries of terrible anguish rent the air from the doomed desperado. He writhed and struggled, but he was bound securely, and as the flames began to scorch his body, his screams could have been heard perhaps miles away.

Tench could not distinguish half that he said, but out of it one phrase pierced his numb consciousness. "Kid, save me!" wailed Black Pete. "The Injun beasts is roastin' me to hell!"

Tench could endure no more. This plea was enough. Not only was it from a human being in extreme pain, but it came from another white man. However degraded and defiled, however unworthy and remiss, Pete was still human, and still white. Tench forgot the precariousness of his own situation, forgot everything except the poignant appeal of that piercing cry.

"Coming, Pete!" he cried, and precipitating himself down the sides of the stadium, pushing his way through the astonished Mayans until his foot was on the second of the three steps leading to the pyre. He felt the heat of the flames as the guards seized him.

"Quick, kid, or I'm done for," roared the sizzling Pete. Tench could not see the vic-

tim; for he was obscured in flame and smoke. But now he was prevented from further onslaught. The guards held him securely.

Tench looked into the stern countenance of the aged chief, whose eyes were blazing with religious fervor. He realized that he was dealing with a fanatical zeal that would destroy his life next, if he persisted. Yet he did not hesitate.

"Stop it!" he cried. "This is inhuman. You must stop."

The old chief laid a hand on his shoulder compassionately. The intensity in his eyes was replaced by a gentle smile. Plainly he looked upon Tench as an unreasoning child, frightened by his first sight of a holocaust.

"No man can stay the judgment of the Sun," said he gently. "This is the test of the great father. No man has injured this criminal? No Mayan would dare to take his life. The Sun alone can take life, for only the Sun can give life!"

The chief pointed to the head of the stone couch. Now Tench could see what had been indistinct to him from his seat above. It was a primitive touch-hole bored through a small rock with the polished jewel from Za's breast acting as a powerful magnifying glass for the rays of the Sun, which had passed through it, igniting some grains of saltpeter which lay below. These in turn had spread to the waiting pyre.

It was as the chief had said; only too true. No human hand directly set about the destruction of the criminal. It was the Sun test. If, for any reason, the Sun failed to ignite the grains of saltpeter through the Sun Window, then the prisoner would not be burned. It was as cruel and merciless as the water test wherein young babes were thrown without preparation into a raging stream to sink or swim, only with less chance of survival.

Perception of the technique of the execution came to Tench in the momentary flash of a few seconds. Outwardly he was conscious only of the fact that before him lay a human creature, being burned to death. He protested violently and pleaded with tears in his eyes that it be stopped.

From the rear seats came angry impreca-

tions against Tench. The guards held him securely, and looked toward the chief of the council for words of command. It appeared that they would have thrown Tench on the fire with Black Pete in a second, if the word were given.

The kindliness of the aged man intervened in favor of the precipitate Xtla.

"You are 'the fleet one'," he admonished. "Return to your seat. Watch and pray. The Sun test is the greatest lesson offered to a Mayan by the god. Observe its teachings. Reflect that you are one of the Sun's children, but only an atom in his power."

Meanwhile the flames were crackling on the stone slab, and the shrieks of the excoriated robber had trailed off into a dying moan.

A film went over Tench's eyes. He sank back limp into the arms of the guards and collapsed. He had fainted.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE AFTERMATH.

THE next Tench knew, he was being carried along a path in the jungle.

Xlaco was at his side, solicitously watching for signs of returning consciousness. He came to, as if out of a nightmare. With a wild exclamation he demanded: "Where is he! Save him!"

The bearers placed him on his feet, though holding him firmly by the arms. Whether this was to restrain him, or to sustain him, he could not be sure.

Xlaco laid a firm, kind hand across his brow. It was the same hand that had succored him in the desert, the hand that had brought him back from the shadow of the grave. He saw only kindly concern in the patient old eyes which regarded him with tender solicitude.

"Be calm," said Xlaco, "or the fever will come upon you once more."

Tench looked about. They were a few paces outside the entrance to the recess in which lay the stadium, which was obscured from his vision. Groups of Mayans were pressing around them, but not too close.

They seemed fearful of coming too near

lest some of the lunatic contagion spread to them. They were regarding the fleet one as people anywhere regard a man demented, or the victim of a fitful malady.

In the opening between the two buttes. Tench could see smoke ascending lazily as from the embers of a dying fire. The mere sight was painful. He shuddered and closed his eyes for the moment. Then he looked to Xlaco imploringly, as he asked: "Is he dead?"

"The Sun god has taken him," Xlaco replied sternly.

"Terrible," muttered Tench.

"It is justice," said Xlaco.

"Abominable! Revolting!"

"It is the will of the Sun god."

Tench flared back, indignantly: "It is Mayan cruelty."

Xlaco rose to his full height and replied in solemn reproof: "A Mayan is never cruel. He is the obedient child of the Sun. He obeys the will of his god. Only the Sun can reward or punish. Only by obediently following the behests of the Sun can the Mayan remain on this earth."

"But he was not a murderer. He was only a thief," Tench protested, his mind arguing after the event in favor of the late wily Pete, and prompted to judgment by the standards of the civilization into which he had been born.

A deep love for this wayward, unreasoning young man must have actuated the heart of the old Mayan; for Xlaco took the trouble to explain. "He was a thief of the Sun's Windows. He was caught entering the sacred mine.

"If a heathen who does not partake of the belief in the Sun god should possess a window of the Sun, he would become at once the father of all criminals, for the Sun's Windows are terrible in beauty and arouse in the breast of man pride and envy, lust and murder.

"One who would steal a window of the Sun is at heart both a thief and murderer. His crime places him beyond the judgment of man. He is a fit subject only for the test of the Sun. The god alone can judge him."

This inexorable, simple, savage logic rendered Tench speechless for a moment, espe-

cially on top of what he had just witnessed. He was none the less revolted, not more reconciled to the Mayan cruelty; but he perceived how useless was protest, and he realized that he had strained the indulgence of Xlaco almost to its limit.

He saw the resentful glances of the guards who stood beside him. He felt in the sullen looks of the Mayans beyond a growing resentment. If he was to save his own life, if he was to escape from these hideous conditions, he must tread warily.

He could do nothing more for Pete; it was too late to think of that now. The sufferings of the miserable desperado were at an end. If he had died at the end of a noose, or a firing squad, Tench would not have been upset. It was only the method of the execution which unnerved him.

As they proceeded back toward the stone huts Tench pondered silently, and came to a clearer understanding of his own mental condition. The Sun test had brought him completely to his senses. This ended for him the lure of the primitive.

The poetry and glamour of the life of his ancestors three or four thousand years before no longer had any hold on him. The tortuous evolution through those thousands of years down which his immediate progenitors had come had refined his soul.

While the Mayans had stood still, his people had gone on, active in the life of the race, suffering, renouncing, achieving, conquering their cruel instincts, overcoming the brute within.

He knew now that he could not go back. Renunciation of the generation and the times in which he had been born was impossible. It had been a glamorous dream, but now he saw what horrible consequences might result from it if he indulged it further.

Man does not stand still, he told himself. He must advance, ever on and on, up from the monad into man, from the brute into the human, from the animal to the spirit, out of hypocrisy into light and truth.

No. He must turn his back on the Mayans, and quickly. He must escape from a pestilence, but he could not go without Za. It was more important that she should go, even than that he should get away.

In his heart Tench had no doubt that Black Pete's "hunch" as to the origin of Za was correct. Even if she was not actually the lost daughter of "old man McCarthy," she was yet a white woman, bred of the same bone as himself, endowed with the same instincts, and with the same cultural background.

Whence she came among these Mayans was a mystery, but it was not so important that it should be solved. The only mystery that he had to solve lay in the question of how to get her out of there—with her consent, preferably; but to get her out, and quickly.

With these reflections he dissembled in the presence of Xlaco. By the time they reached the stone hut, he seemed to be on sympathetic terms with the old man. He accepted the dissertation on the judgment of the Sun with a single word. "Aye," he said, and inclined his head in the Mayan form of reverential expression.

Swiftly among the members of the tribe soft words were spread: "The fever has departed." "The fleet one is himself again." These expressions passed throughout the village, accompanied by grave noddings of the head.

It was within their knowledge that witnessing the Sun test might create in a beholder a spasmodic protest such as had seized Xtla, but none had ever seen it come before to a young man. It usually attacked a woman, or a girl; Mayan men were made of sterner stuff.

Allowances, however, were made for Xtla, because of his foreign origin, and his white skin. His fleetness of foot rendered him supreme and perhaps now, they argued, that he was initiated to the meaning of the full rigors of the Sun test, he would become wholly and for all time a Mayan.

He would be an excellent addition to the tribe, a fit husband for one of its daughters, and to be properly mated under the auspices of the council at the next spring festival. Every feminine eye and heart in the village began estimating the chances of securing him as a husband.

While the men were inclined to deride his exhibition of weakness in the amphitheater,

the women loved him the more for it. They could not find it in their hearts to condemn one who had openly expressed what many of them secretly felt.

Their words of adulation spread through the tribe so that the men sullenly held their peace and reserved judgment on Xtla. He was not for them to judge, anyway. That was an affair for the council and, in the last analysis, the Sun god.

For a few days life went on as it had before. Tench studiously observed every form of Mayan living which he had been taught, but there was no longer any soothing satisfaction in it. With the greatest difficulty he calmed his impetuous desire to escape.

From time to time he became aware of the surveillance of Huasco. The Aztec, as Tench ticketed him in his own mind, soft-footed as a cat, made a habit of frequenting his neighbors in the next hut. He would appear there at any hour of the day and make himself at home. Only Tench realized that his purpose there was to observe the goings and comings of Xtla.

The passing of Black Pete had occurred in the last quarter of the moon. A week later the new moon came in, the July moon. It was the lush strength of the year, the Sun at its best, the Mayan zenith. The arroyos were all dry and the vegetation was growing brittle, as there had been no rains for three months. The corn was just coming in.

Tench watched the ascendancy of the new moon. He began to figure on the time when the High Priestess must go alone to the rocky glen. He knew from Xlaco that her communings now with the moon were considered of great import, for the Mayans believed she would thus implore her mothers' influence with her father to quicken the harvest.

He had made no effort to approach her pueblo. Guards were stationed about this, and he knew it would be hazardous in the extreme to attempt to reach her there. One word of his purpose might deprive him of his liberty. He shuddered to think what interpretation the council might place upon it.

He dared not even ask what punishment

was meted out to any who dared to profane the High Priestess by seeking to speak to her alone. Would it be the Sun test? Surely there could be nothing worse.

In any event, Tench determined not to risk a dramatic revelation of this unknown punishment by seeking her in her pueblo, where the chances were all against his success. Her lonely venture into the rocky glen, however, seemed a propitious opportunity; for the Mayans would religiously avoid her on that occasion. She would be accompanied by guards to the edge of the glen, and they would wait for her there while she went alone to her meeting with the moon.

He was apprehensive of Huasco. He was well aware of the Aztec's purpose in frequenting the hut next door. He strove to allay suspicion and to ward off the treacherous shadow which he knew was being laid on him, by going nowhere alone, and by remaining as much as possible in his hut. To all appearances he had calmed every suspicion. He had been wholeheartedly accepted as a Mayan, with all tribal liberties and privileges.

The first two nights of the new moon were a bit cloudy. The luminary was not clear. He knew that Za would not venture out then. The third night the stars were brilliant in the sky, and the moon was due to rise about eleven o'clock. It would remain in the sky until after dawn, conditions ideal for his quest.

The last daylight went out of the sky between eight thirty and nine. As the dark came down, Tench called cheerily to his neighbors in the Mayan fashion: "May the god rest you to another dawn." He saw Huasco sitting with them, and heard him respond monotonously and low with the others. He withdrew to his bench and lay down.

After about an hour he slipped silently to the door and looked up and down the street. No one was in sight. Apparently all good Mayans had gone to bed. Those next door had retired. Evidently Huasco, too, had gone to his rest.

Tench waited another hour and then, when the night was darkest with only the stars in the sky, he began his preparations.

For days he had been secreting maize cakes. These he packed around his waist.

They would start him on his journey, although he had no fear of finding sustenance, for by this time he had learned the ways of jungle folk, and knew where to find herbs, and roots and berries sufficient to subsist on for any length of time, and especially so in the height of summer.

He knew that he would have probably only one chance to prevail on Za to flee with him. Over and over again in his mind he had cast up the possibilities of a meeting with her. He intended to use all the persuasion he could, but he had decided that, if necessary, he would use force—for her own good, of course, and as gently as possible. But she would have to come with him. It was a matter of life or death.

He slipped like a wraith along the rocky street, bending low in the shadows, and hugging the lintels of the huts. No wild animal could have gone more softly. From time to time he looked about to be sure that Huasco was not following him. He saw no telltale form of man or beast.

When he reached the jungle path he stood upright and breathed freely, stretched himself, and rearranged the girdle which held the maize cakes, then pressed on toward the rocky glen. He reached it just as the first thin scimitar of the new moon was showing along the crest of the hills through the trees.

Cicadas were chirping lustily throughout the forest, harbingers of a hot day to come. A faint breeze stirred. The night was only fairly cool, a warm summer night. His lack of clothing refreshed him. For a fleeting moment he said to himself that he would be sorry to get back where convention required that the body be hidden at all times from the life-giving oxygen.

He secreted himself at the edge of the glen and waited. In a short time he saw approaching a group of figures. Near by the group halted. One became detached, and went on alone into the glen. He waited until the figure had disappeared around the corner of a rock.

Then stealthily he crept after it. In fifteen minutes he had traversed a mile without finding the object of his search. He be-

came apprehensive that he had lost her, and started to retrace his steps.

Then, she became apparent in a little cleared space off to the left. The huitzin was dropped at her feet. The girdle and the short skirt and the regalia of Sun Windows outlined her figure, in the new moon light. Her hands were aloft. She was speaking softly. She was absorbed in her prayer, oblivious of any possible danger or intrusion.

He crept closer and crouched on one knee, watching her for a moment, entranced. Ever since the Sun test he had been telling himself that his concern for her was solely that of one marooned white person for another, similarly outcast.

He had deluded himself with the thought that he was only a humanitarian. Now, a great tide of love welled in his heart; no price was too great for her protection. With her in danger or distress, life would be worthless.

Respectfully, he waited until her prayer was over. It went on for a long, long time, although to him, the period was short. He could not distinguish what she said, but he could not doubt her sincerity. To her this was apparently no mumbo jumbo of a conventional ritual. It was a supplication which poured from her heart with fervor. Lucky the tribe with such a High Priestess; dull the moon which would not respond to such a prayer.

"Za," he whispered. She was so absorbed she did not hear him.

He rose and went a pace nearer, and spoke a little more loudly: "Za."

She turned swiftly like a startled fawn, and saw him advancing in the moonlight. She reached down and seized her huitzin, pulling it up over her shoulders, and wrapping it securely about her. He almost smiled to himself. How revelatory of her true origin was this instinct to clothe herself! A primitive woman would have thought nothing of scanty clothing under the gaze of a man. Only a woman with a psychic response to centuries of modest training would so intuitively respond to the first suggestion of male advent.

She was not frightened, evidently, only on guard.

She saw at once who it was.

"You," she exclaimed sternly, but in a low voice. He was grateful for the softness of her voice. Speaking as she did, it would not carry back to the waiting guards at the edge of the glen. He realized that this hushing of her tones was in a very subtle sense an acceptance of the conspiracy he desired now to propose.

Emboldened, he came very close to her, until only the space of an arm's length separated them. At first he thought he read in her eyes a gladness to see him, but then her brows contracted, and she drew the huitzin more closely about her, as her head went back and she said tensely: "This is a terrible mistake."

"No, Za, it was the only way I could think of to reach you. I was afraid to go to the pueblo. I must tell you what I have learned. I must talk with you."

"Oh, Xtla, for your own sake, beware! Return at once, quickly. Even if I can forget what you have done in coming here like this, the council may hear of it and then I—even Za—could not save you."

Impulsively he laid a hand on her arm. She started to withdraw it, and then stood firmly looking at him as if hypnotized; wanting to hear what he had to say, and yet as if dominated by an unspoken, overmastering fear.

"Za," he pleaded, "you are no more Mayan than I. Back behind your skull is a white brain just like mine. Your heart is white. Look," he laid his hand on hers, "your skin is white, like mine."

She seemed to shrivel, and closed her eyes, as if in pain. "No," she muttered, breathing heavily: "No! No!"

The instinctive male in him took this to be a woman's "no." Her body swayed very slightly toward him, but her eyes opened as though with an effort of the will, and this time she said more vehemently: "No, I am Mayan." And then added as though recalling an almost forgotten ritual: "I am Za, daughter of the Sun, divine gift of the god to Maya."

Suddenly, as if in a second, he was afflicted with a perception of what he had to meet in her. It was more than just ignorant superstition. It was that, but it was the

power and place, the unique position of importance and acclaim which every breath of her life enjoyed with feminine autocracy, an obstacle to hurdle which he had not contemplated.

He replied, steadily gazing at her with level, sincere eyes: "You are mistaken, Za. You are the daughter of Mr. McCarthy of Tonopah, Nevada, and I have come to take you home, to return you to your mortal father, who is desolate without you."

All friendliness in her seemed broken by this assertion. An outraged fire of resent-

ment blazed in her eyes. She stepped back out of his reach. "Are you indeed mad! Must the council condemn you for heresy!"

"Za—"

"Say no more," she insisted. "My ears can blot out what you have said—"

"You must listen to me," he went on haltingly, becoming bewildered at the strength of her belief and the force of her opposition.

"I cannot!" she exclaimed with finality. "If you persist, the Sun god, alone, can answer."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Don't fail to begin "The Return of George Washington," by George F. Worts, starting in the October 15th issue.

AUTUMN WOODS

THE leaves are slowly drifting down,
 Upon the fitful breezes tossed
 Like rainbow ghosts that sadly mourn
 The summer beauty they have lost,
 And, while the tall trees stand and dream
 Of winter with its drifting snows,
 The woodland ways are echoing
 The raucous cawing of the crows.

Like rain upon the withered leaves
 The ripened chestnuts swiftly fall,
 As squirrels clatter through the trees,
 As chipmunks in the shadows call,
 And all the smoky autumn haze,
 That covers meadow, vale and hill,
 Is heavy with the sweet perfume
 The clusters of the foxgrapes spill.

There is a sadness in the air,
 The trees are tremulous with sighs,
 The breezes lift an elegy
 Into the reaches of the skies,
 As frost-blown leaves are drifting down
 Like bits of gold, like flames blood-red,
 To heap them on the withered earth,
 The bier where summer smiles—though dead.

Edgar Daniel Kramer.



Dry Air

By ARTHUR EVAN JAMES

"JUST keep your peepers on that long-necked, red-labeled bottle, Mr. Tenderfoot!" Alkali Joe breezed out, yanking his big six-shooter from its holster and pointing it toward the farther end of the long shelf behind the Wet House bar.

"I always calculates to show blowing greenhorns what an Arizona born and bred gent has been educated up to whenever they start handing out their line of bull. Most generally it's an object lesson to 'em. Just watch how we folks can take the neck off of that bottle without spilling a drop! Then maybe you'll stop bragging about how you rescued a girl from the top of a burning ninety-story building and the likes."

I'd landed in Redbug, a copper mining town, the afternoon before, trying to find a place that 'd heal up a spot on one of my lungs. While I looked as healthy as they make 'em, a big New York doctor had told me that Coney Island was no place for a fellow who was threatened with the con, and if I didn't beat it West where the air was dry, they'd be arranging lilies on my chest in two or three years. Scared stiff at the thoughts of never reaching thirty, I made for Arizona quick.

It was awful lonesome, landing in a burg like Redbug without knowing a soul. Nobody even gave me a nod as I walked up and down the town's only street, covered almost ankle-deep with a fine, sandy dust, and without a sign of a pavement or curb. The low frame buildings on either side were as dusty and dull as the ground between.

Taken altogether, it gave me the blues. It made me terribly homesick for the bunch back in old Coney. So, the next day, it was only natural I'd drift into the Wet House bar and try to make some friends in the crowd.

Of course, I hadn't meant to do any bragging—only trying to attract some attention so's the boys would notice me the next time we met on the street. But people always did misunderstand me somehow.

Even when I tried to tell a sociable story back East, they'd look at me like they thought I was a liar. That was bad enough, but when one of the Coney lifeguards had christened me "Blowhouse Gus"—well, that was the limit!

It made me awfully sore, seeing how everybody on the Island took it up when I'd only been trying to entertain them.

"You needn't bother showing off your shooting education, mister!" I says, quick-like, 'cause Alkali Joe was about two sheets under the wind, and I thought there was no telling where the bullet might go. "I wasn't handing out any bull—all I was telling you fellows is straight. You can believe it or not!"

Alkali Joe rested his right elbow on the yellow pine bar and looked at me sharp, eying up my double-breasted blue serge suit, set off by my sailor straw hat and yellow tan shoes.

"And you expect us to swallow them yarns!" he tried to shout, his tongue a little thick. "Huh! I never yet seen a white-collared dude what didn't have a swelled head, but you take the cake for crust! I never run up against anything like it! It strikes me you need a little lesson about as bad as any fellow I've ever met. So, here goes!"

The crowd pulled back from the bar as Alkali Joe drew his bead on the bottle.

Bang! A good inch of the neck, carrying the cork, went spattering all over the room.

"How's that?" Alkali Joe sings out, turning to me while he slipped his gun back in his belt. "I'll bet you never saw any such shooting back in the East!"

"Not so bad for a fellow that's half drunk," I says, sneering into his face, "but it's nothing for a sober guy."

The crowd kind of snickered, and Alkali Joe got awfully mad.

"I'd like to see you do it—drunk or sober!" he shouts, waving his arms.

"That's just kids' shouting!" I spouted, seeing a fine chance to make a big hit with the boys. "If you care to watch, I'll show you a real shot!"

When I drew my little thirty-two from my hip pocket, Alkali Joe and the rest of the bunch giggled, then started to roar. That made me kind of sore. I never could stand much kidding.

"See that next bottle—the one with the cork sticking out?" I asks, stifflike, wheeling around to the crowd. "Well, I'm going to plug through that cork without touching a bit of glass—that's what I call a real shot!"

"Never thought the sport was that drunk!" some one in the crowd snickers. "You've got to hand it to him for carrying his liquor like a gentleman—I never got wise."

That helped a lot. It gave me a good alibi in case I missed, even if I was almost as sober as a judge.

While the crowd stood grinning like a batch of fools, I steadied my gun and took careful aim. Holding my breath, I squeezed the trigger.

Bang! Nothing seemed to move 'cepting the splinters from the planking in back.

The bunch started to razz me proper—asking if my gun wasn't loaded with blanks and all sorts of josh like that.

"Better take a look at the cork, gentlemen!" I wheezes. "It would be damn funny if I missed."

At that, the crowd roared loud enough to shake the hotel. Then a tall, long-whiskered old man with a nickel-plated star pinned on his red flannel shirt, winked at the rest and hustled around the end of the bar.

Grabbing the bottle from the shelf, he started to give it the once-over. The rest of the crowd were still laughing hard enough to split their sides.

"What do you find, sheriff—the liquor shot away without bustin' the bottle or budging the cork?" some one kidded.

The sheriff turned and stood the bottle on the bar, his gray eyes almost poking out of his thin, red face.

"I—I find the best shot I ever seen made!" he stammered, just like he couldn't hardly believe it himself. "The bullet has passed right through the middle of the top of the cork! And a greenhorn Easterner at that!"

For a couple of seconds, the crowd stared at me, open-mouthed, just like they thought I must be Buffalo Bill in disguise. Then they crowded around the bottle, talking all at once.

When Alkali Joe had seen that the sheriff wasn't kidding, he came back to where I stood.

"There's something damned strange about a white-faced dude like you being able to shoot like that!" he shouted, giving

me a queer look. "What's your game around here, anyhow? And how long are you figuring on staying?"

I didn't like to say right out how I was threatened with the con. I was kind of sensitive about not being as husky as I looked.

"I've always heard how healthy and prosperous this country is, and I thought I'd come and look it over," I told him. "If I can pick up a good job, maybe I'll stick for keeps. As to my shooting ability—well, I've traveled around a bit in my time."

I didn't think it was necessary to tell 'em how I'd been working in a shooting gallery in Coney Island for the last two years, ever since my lungs had started to go bad on me and I had to knock off from my regular trade, that of ventriloquist in Punch and Judy shows.

When I had to leave the puppets, I was all broke up, 'cause I was the best voice thrower in the business and was making lots of jack. While I didn't have to use my lungs on that shooting gallery job, the pay was awfully low compared to what I had been getting.

I soon saw if I wanted to save anything, I couldn't stick in that shooting gallery forever. So I took every chance I got to practice, blazing away at clay pipes and bull's-eyes with both rifles and pistols, hoping to get good enough to pick up a job on some vaudeville circuit. I put in hours and hours on that sort of training.

Just before the doctor chased me West, a booking agent had given me a tryout and was tickled to death with my stuff—said he'd never seen anything like it. While he was fixing up a contract with the Keith people, the X-rays showed up that spot on my lungs.

Then I couldn't put my John Hancock on the papers when they came. There were tears in my eyes when I sent 'em back with a little note, explaining how I'd have to turn it down 'cause I had to go West for my health.

It was every bit as big a blow to me as leaving the puppet shows. It seemed as if I was the most unlucky devil ever born—having so much natural ability and never given the chance to use it.

But I didn't think it was just the thing to tell the crowd in the Wet House bar this whole story of my life. They might not think so much of my shooting ability if they found out how I'd got my education.

And I wanted to make as big a hit as I could with the boys. Let them wonder! You couldn't blame me.

"Didn't I hear you say you were trying to find a job?" the sheriff broke in. "If you are, you're just the kind of man I'm looking for—I can always tell an honest fellow by taking one squint at his face. You see, I'm the express agent here as well as the sheriff, and it's mighty hard to handle these two jobs alone.

"You've showed me how you can shoot, and I take it you've got brains enough to make out waybills and the likes of that. We're handling more shipments every day, and along with the law, it's getting too much for one man. What do you say to helping me out?"

I had to get a job somewhere. My roll wouldn't last more than two months, and I couldn't expect to get my lungs healed by that time. So this seemed like a good chance.

"The express business would suit me fine!" I says, edging my way to the sheriff's side. "I'm right there on figures, and I could soon learn to take care of the express work, giving you your time to look after the law. But how much would the job pay?"

The sheriff took off his big ten-gallon hat and scratched his gray head. "I can't afford to pay more than forty dollars a month and board out of my own pocket for the express work. But the county allows me fifty dollars a month for a deputy, and I just lost Sam Harkins, my old sidekick, about a month ago. I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll give you that appointment, and along with the express work, that 'll make ninety a month and board. That's not at all bad!"

"I'll say it's not!" I spouts, quick as I could get out the words. "I'll get on the job any time you say!"

The sheriff stroked his beard and smiled, pleasedlike. "Come to the express office at seven to-morrow morning, then. I didn't get your name!"

"Gus—Gus Swailer. Or Blow 'em up Gus, as I'm most generally called," I fills in, drawing myself up to my full height and twisting my old nickname around a bit so's to make a better impression on the boys. "I'll be on deck at seven all right. You can depend on that."

A man walked into the bar and whispered something in the sheriff's ear.

The sheriff turned to me.

"I've got to be moving down the street," he sighed, just like he didn't want to tear himself away from me and the bunch. "Maybe I'd better swear you in as my deputy before I go so's your pay 'll start in right away. We won't have much time in the morning, going over all that express business."

"Good idea, sheriff," I says.

"I'll get a Bible for you, sheriff," the bartender, who had been earing in, cries. "I've got one up in my room that my poor old dead mother gave me the day I left Kansas. I'll have it down in a minute."

It didn't seem to take him that long to bring down the Bible.

Then the sheriff raised his hand for silence and swore me in. When it was all over, the crowd gave three loud cheers, and every man shook my hand. My hat began to feel a little tight on my head.

The sheriff touched my arm, bringing me back to earth. "I'll see you in the morning, then! I must hustle along now—a party waiting for me down the street."

"I'll be at the express office at seven sharp, sheriff!" I answers. "Good-by, and much obliged for the job!"

The sheriff looked at me kind of funny like, and then walked out.

When he was gone, one of the boys comes to my side and takes my arm, just as a fellow does when he wants to get confidential. I was all puffed up by this time, thinking how I'd landed one of them political jobs what don't take any work 'cepting to indorse the pay checks.

It seemed awfully soft, 'specially since I hadn't been in the place a full day. You had to hand it to these Westerners for recognizing a man of ability as soon as they saw him!

"Did you ever tackle one of these depu-

ty sheriff's jobs before, stranger?" the fellow asks, squinting at me, queerlike. "There's a lot to 'em sometimes!"

"Here's a sorehead what wanted the soft snap for himself!" I thinks, seeing the hard look in his face. "And there's nothing he'd like better than for me to spill something that'd give him the chance to go around and say I wasn't fitted for the job. Not everybody would know that the sheriff wasn't figuring on me to do any of the law work, and this fellow might find lots of people who would side in with him. I'll fool him on that! I'll lay it on thick!"

"If you only knew of all the bad actors I've stacked up against, you wouldn't ask any such question as that, my friend!" I spouted, loud enough for every one to hear. "How do you suppose I acquired my shooting eye—killing sparrows? Why, if I'd started to notch my gun like some of your old-timers, I'd had the grips cut clean off in less than a year!"

The fellow looked kind of flabbergasted.

"I wouldn't have mentioned it, Gus," he choked, "only I was thinking of the Red Handkerchief. I'm not worrying much about anything else."

"What's the Red Handkerchief?" I asks, quicklike, 'cause I saw kind of a scared look on every one's face at the mention of those words.

The man looked at me full-eyed. "You don't mean to say you've never heard of the Red Handkerchief?"

I shook my head.

"Why, he's the worst bandit in the whole Southwest! He and his gang are making it mighty troublesome for every sheriff and deputy from the Colorado to the Rio Grande."

"But why do they 'call him the Red Handkerchief?" I asked, getting quite interested as I'd read about fellows like him in dime novels when I was a kid.

"They calls him that 'cause he always wears a big, red handkerchief tied over his face. Nobody, 'cepting maybe his gang, knows just what kind of looking fellow he is. When you see him with that handkerchief hitched up to the top of his nose and his hat pulled down over his eyes, you can't tell whether he's twenty or sixty. But he's

the worst devil that ever troubled these parts—thinks no more of killing a man than taking a smoke!”

“Sam Harkins would never have left us if it hadn’t been for him!” some one in the back of the crowd moans in.

“So that’s the reason Harkins threw up the deputy job!” I spouts. “That Red Handkerchief fellow got his nerve!”

“He got more than that, partner!” another one of the boys groaned. “He got his life! When they brought poor Sam in from Double Gulch, there was more than a dozen bullet holes through his body. Sam never had a chance with that bird!”

I was mighty glad my job was going to be in the express office. With that Red Handkerchief running around loose, the sheriff was welcome to all the credit for upholding the law.

I didn’t want to run up against that bullet-spitting masquerader! But I didn’t dare let on just how I felt about it to the boys.

“I’d like to shoot it out with Mr. Red Handkerchief some day,” I says, trying to speak boldlike, though there seemed to be something catching in my throat, “but I don’t suppose I’ll ever get the chance. You see, the sheriff’s figuring to take care of all the law work, and that ’ll keep me cooped up in the express office most of my time.”

“Don’t worry about never getting the chance, Gus!” some one shouted. “The sheriff’s not figuring on getting more time to look after the law. He’s figuring on more time to get drunk! There’s nobody in Redbug what likes his booze as much as the sheriff; even if he is the nerviest man we’ve got.”

That had me guessing.

“But what’s his boozing got to do with me?” I asked, weaklike.

“A whole lot! Whenever the Red Handkerchief starts to cut up his capers and the sheriff’s drunk, you’ll have to get on the job. What’s a deputy for, anyway!”

Just then, the job didn’t look near so good to me as it had a little while before. I could shoot at a target all right, but when it came to shooting at some other fellow while that fellow was shooting at me—well, I wasn’t keen about that—not a-tall! I’d never been shot at in my life, and I

knew I couldn’t hit a barn door when I was looking into the muzzle of some one else’s gun.

I wasn’t cut out for any such job as this, nohow! I figured how I’d have to go to the sheriff and tell him the climate didn’t agree with me—that I’d have to leave Redbug quick.

“I never thought the sheriff was a hard drinking man,” I kind of choked. “And I came here for my health!”

“You’re not afraid, are you, Gus?” one of the boys quizzed, a big grin on his face. “Why, if I’d put away all the men you have, I wouldn’t be afraid to go after the whole Mexican army!”

My face got as red as a beet.

“No—no! It’s not that!” I muttered, trying hard to look brave. “But a stranger’s kind of weak on your laws. You see, I might—”

“Come over here and join us in a little game, Mr. Deputy Sheriff!” Alkali Joe bawls out from a card table in the corner, where he and a couple of others had flopped down the moment before. “You can’t be on your uppers with us now, seeing how you’re one of our officials—as long as you last. Here’s a chair waiting for you!”

I guess I was so fussed up, trying to think out an answer for that fellow at my side, that I was glad for the chance to get away from him. Then maybe, too, I wanted to get my mind off of poor Sam. Anyhow, I walked over to the table, sat down, and took a hand.

Luck seemed to be with me on the start-off. But it didn’t stick. After I’d won about twenty dollars, the cards turned against me, and I was soon short my winnings, along with over half of my own roll.

When I took stock of my chips and saw how short I was, I got desperate, knowing how I’d have to get back some of my dough to keep traveling along, away from Redbug and that deputy job. So when I made three aces, I bet my whole works and prayed that some one at the table would cover.

Some one did all right—Alkali Joe. And he had a heart flush! And I was broke!

So there was nothing left for me to do, except to fall back on the sheriff and pray that the Red Handkerchief, or nobody else,

would start kicking over the traces before I got my hands on that first ninety and beat it out of town.

It took most all my nerve to drag myself down to the express office the next morning. It was just alongside the little railroad station of the single track branch that ran into Redbug, and over which only one mixed train came and went each day.

I found the sheriff waiting for me, his face all flushed up and his breath a little strong. He showed me all about getting shipments in and out of the car, weighing packages, figuring the charges from the charts, and making out waybills and receipts. Then he took me over to a corner where a brand new safe was standing.

"This here safe is the finest in the whole State of Arizona!" he says, proudlike. "It's one of them newfangled kind—man-mangenmen steel, they calls 'em. Guaranteed absolutely burglar-proof! I had a hell of a time in getting the company to give it to me. It's only because the Bright Lode's pay roll kept getting so big and we've got to keep it here over night, that they listened. There's no telling when the Red Handkerchief might try a raid—he's got nerve enough to try anything!"

The Red Handkerchief again! Couldn't I ever get him off of my mind! This express job seemed almost as bad as the deputy's.

"But—but do you think he'd ever try it in the daytime?" I stammered.

The sheriff shook his head. "Nope—not on your life! He'd have his hands full enough in the night, let alone when it was light and everybody about."

That made me feel a little better. I was to stay with the sheriff. And his house was at the other end of the town.

"I'll show you the combination," the sheriff went on, bending over the knob. "And don't forget to be sure she's locked up tight every night when you leave!"

I nodded and watched him open the safe, keeping the numbers and twists well in mind.

A few minutes later, the sheriff mentioned something about having to go up the street. Scared all the while that he meant to get drunk, leaving the law in my hands if any-

thing turned up, I tried to point out to him how it was bad to drink much liquor while it was so hot.

I kind of smoothed things up by saying how I'd noticed that his veins didn't look quite right, and I didn't want to see anything happen to him, 'cause I had a friend back East that kept on drinking when his veins got like that, and he cashed in in less than a month.

The sheriff acted kind of surprised—said no one had ever mentioned it before, but he'd watch out. Then he walked out of the office, staring at the veins in his hands.

The gag worked fine for more than two weeks, the sheriff staying as sober as a judge. During this time, I'd got the run of the express business down pat.

The sheriff would drop into the office only about twice a day, and not for more than a few minutes at a time. He stuck to that sheriff job tight. Things didn't seem so bad after all!

So when one morning he rushed in, all excited like and holding a letter in his hand, I was curious to know what was up.

He flopped down on a chair and started to cuss.

It seemed he'd got orders from the express boss at the other end of the line to place our new safe in the branch's only express car—an ordinary freight car painted dark green without a window cut in anywhere—they were hard up for equipment in them days. We were to have the old safe that was now in the car, one that was 'way out of date and not much good.

The Big Boss had got a tip that the Red Handkerchief was hanging around the lower part of the branch, and he figured we could protect the old-fashioned car safe better in a town like Redbug than they could on the road. So he'd given the sheriff orders to switch the safes.

The sheriff didn't like it at all. He was stuck on that new safe. And that was what was making him cuss.

But he knew it'd be no use to chew the rag about the matter. Orders were orders. So when the express car came in—that afternoon, we got a lot of fellows to help us and changed the safes about.

I could never quite figure whether it was

because the company took that safe away from him, or whether it was through a stranger who landed in town, but the sheriff started on an awful bat. Anyhow, he and that dark-skinned fellow with the funny eyes started to hit 'em up at the Wet House that evening for keeps.

The sheriff never showed up at his house all that night, and in the morning, his wife and me couldn't find him anywheres around town, hard as we looked. I was awfully uneasy about the whole thing when I opened up the express office late. I just felt it would be my luck for something to turn up. And it did!

About ten o'clock, a short, heavy set, middle-aged man, dressed more like an Easterner with his long-trousered gray suit and Panama hat, walked into the office and asked for the sheriff. When I told him the sheriff wasn't about, muttering something about him being called out of town, the man got awfully peeved.

After staring at the floor a moment or two, he raised his light blue eyes, mopped his clean-shaven face with a small, white handkerchief, and spit out what was on his mind.

He said he was with the railroad, at headquarters, and they'd got a tip that the Red Handkerchief was planning to stage a holdup on the lower end of the branch. It seemed, according to the dope they'd got, that the Red Handkerchief was figuring to stop the train at Whitesand Springs, about ten miles off the main line, and about forty miles below Redbug.

So he'd come to see the sheriff, intending to ask him to form a posse and hide around the Whitesand Springs for the next few days, hoping he'd be able to nail the Red Handkerchief and his gang, and put a stop to their robberies. He was as sore as a pup 'cause he hadn't found the sheriff in.

After cussing under his breath a little while, he asked who was the sheriff's deputy.

I'd been expecting something like that, and while he'd been cussing to himself, I'd been doing some tall thinking.

He wasn't going to get me to go down to Whitesand Springs and lay for that Red Handkerchief. Not if I could help it! I

didn't want to get measured for a wooden overcoat like poor Sam Harkins had!

"You see, the sheriff ain't really got any deputy," I answers, slow and careful-like. "I've got the appointment—just a little political honor the boys gave me—but since the express company made us put our good safe in the car and take that old scrap box, I've got to stick pretty close to the office. We most always have lots of valuables in there, and it wouldn't do for me to get very far away."

"No, of course not!" the man spoke up. "We couldn't think of asking you to leave your post of duty, placed as you are. As a railroad official, I fully understand your situation! We'd expect any of our own men to do the same. It seems that the only thing for me to do is to wait around town for awhile for the sheriff to return. If I should miss him, kindly tell him I've called and give him my message—my name's Saunders—H. A. Saunders. It's very important that he get down into the lower end of the county without delay. We can't tell what day the Red Handkerchief may attack the train."

I was tickled to death with the way my slick spiel had got me out of a bad hole. That old-fashioned safe, standing there in the corner, sure had come in mighty handy for an alibi. If it wasn't for that, he'd 'a' never let up so easy.

"I'll tell him, Mr. Saunders, just as soon as he comes in!" I says, my nerve coming back fast. "And he'll gather up some of the boys and hustle down to Whitesand Springs. It's just breaking my heart that I can't go along, 'cause there's nothing I'd like better than a shot at the Red Handkerchief. But no such luck!"

Saunders stopped on his way to the door and rubbed his chin. "Perhaps I could arrange to have one of our men look after your job. If you say the word, I'll try! Then you could get started for the Springs before the sheriff returns!"

I'd put my foot in it now. I'd have to think up some stall quick.

"That wouldn't hardly do," I mumbles. "You see, the sheriff won't let any one but me have the combination of the safe—it's too risky."

Saunders nodded. "I guess he can't take too many precautions in a country like this. I don't blame him. The way you're tied up here makes it out of the question to go down to the springs. Too bad."

"A damn shame!" I shouted, seeing that Saunders was starting for the door. "Just my luck."

Saunders nodded again, passed through the doorway, and walked up the street.

Then I began to breathe a little easier. I figured the sheriff was bound to show up before long, and since I got to thinking it over, I wasn't much worried about the Red Handkerchief pulling off any of his train holdup stuff that day.

The Bright Lode's pay roll wouldn't be coming up until to-morrow, and he'd at least wait for that. And the sheriff would be back to look after things by that time.

But when the sheriff hadn't showed up at the house when I got out of bed the next morning, I was worried sick. Without stopping to eat any breakfast, I hunted all over town, trying to round him up.

But not a soul had seen him since the night he'd got drinking with that stranger. Nor could I find any one who knew where they went. And the Bright Lode pay roll coming by Whitesand Springs that noon!

But I didn't care to make any cracks around town about getting up a posse and stopping a holdup. I had better sense than that. As the sheriff's deputy, I'd be obliged to lead the bunch and make myself the first target for the Red Handkerchief's gun. Nothing doing at all.

So I went to the office, praying that the Red Handkerchief wasn't set to do business that day—that he'd postpone his little transaction until the next time the Bright Lode pay came up the road, after the sheriff got back. And around one o'clock my prayer seemed to be answered, for the station got a wire from the operator at Drywood, about twenty miles this side of Whitesand Springs, that the train had passed right on time.

I wouldn't have any cause to worry for another week—not until the Bright Lode pay roll came up the road again.

That made me feel so good that I locked up, beat it for the Wet House bar, took

three or four good drinks, and remarked to the boys how peaceful the Red Handkerchief was since I'd got on the deputy job. They all agreed they'd never seen anything like it—that they never knew him to go so long without making trouble of some kind.

"I'll tell you the secret, boys," I says, lapping up another drink. "You've got to make fellows like the Red Handkerchief know that you're not afraid of 'em, then they'll put on the soft pedal every time. You see, he's always had the idea that the sheriff was a little bit scared of him, but since I'm here to help out on the law, it's different."

"Do you suppose he's heard about all the bad actors you've croaked?" one of the boys asked. "That might account for him drawin' in his horns."

"Most likely," I breezed, giving a careless wave of my hand. "You see, the time I killed them four train robbers all at once, back in South Dakota, my name got around the country pretty well. You've never heard about it? Well, that's funny. I'll tell you how it was."

"I was on my way from New York to Frisco when—"

The door opens with a bang and a cow-puncher, sweaty and dusty, rushes into the room.

"My God, boys!" he cries. "The train's been held up at Purple Rocks and every one of the crew killed. The Red Handkerchief and his gang again! They've cut the wires, so I rode in like hell! Where's the sheriff?"

The crowd stared at each other just like they couldn't believe their ears. For a full minute, all our tongues seemed paralyzed.

Even as dumb-struck as I was, I saw through the whole thing in a second. The Red Handkerchief had only been bluffing Saunders and the railroad crowd about his holding up the train at Whitesand Springs, so's they wouldn't be watching at any other point.

And he'd been cute enough to figure that Saunders would try to get the sheriff to hang around the Springs with all the able-bodied men he could pick, far enough away from Purple Rocks so's they couldn't bother him. And if the sheriff hadn't got drunk, he and his posse would be lying around the

Springs this minute, miles away from where the holdup took place.

But as it was, I was to be the goat in this Red Handkerchief business.

"Who—who'd ever expect the Red Handkerchief to pull off a job so close to Redbug?" one of the boys at last opens up. "Why, Purple Rocks is only eight miles below here."

"To hell with what you expected!" the cow-puncher roars out. "Where's the sheriff? I've got to find him quick!"

"The sheriff's on a bust," some one speaks up, "but his deputy's right here—that tall fellow in the blue suit."

The cow-puncher had my arm before I could loosen up my tongue.

"Get your posse together—quick!" he shouts. "You can corner 'em in Rado Pass if you hustle up and ride like hell. They're headed that way."

Say, if I ever wished I'd never been born, it was then. I could just imagine how I'd look riding at the head of those hard-boiled desert rats, having only rode a horse three or four times in my life.

But it wasn't the looks of things that was bothering me so much. It was what was likely to happen later. I could just picture how I'd come tumbling out of my saddle, all white and limp, after the Red Handkerchief had honored me with his first shot. And I'd come here for my health!

"I'm—I'm awfully—awfully sorry!" I stammers. "But I can't leave that gosh-blamed express office. You see, we've got a lot of valuables in that old safe, and the sheriff told me—"

"Don't worry about the office and the safe," some fellow broke in. "We'll see they're watched good while you're away. There's Old Sandy, Peg-legged Bill, and lots of other old-timers what's too old for hard riding, but not for hard shooting. They'll keep an eye on the place. I'll line 'em up right away."

The fellow went out of the bar on a run.

"Seems like you could get up your posse right here, Gus," another sings out. "This roomful of hard-drinking, hard-riding, hard-shooting huskies, with a fellow like you at their head, ought to give the Red Handkerchief the run of his life. The only

thing that's troubling me, is that the Red Handkerchief has heard of your reputation and won't come out in the open and fight."

"But I ain't got no horse," I wheezes, my knees shaking fit to be tied. "Never had need of one since I've been here, so I guess I'm out of luck. One of you fellows what's got a good one will have to take my place."

"Redbug never sees any of her officials stuck," a grisly mine boss chimes in. "You can have your pick of the best horses in the town if we've got to take 'em by force, 'cause you're the only one here what's got a chance of shooting it out with the Red Handkerchief and living to tell the tale. There's too damn many amateurs tried it out already. Come along and we'll look the street and stables over. We'll have a dandy for you in a jiffy."

My brain was churning around like one of them electric clothes washers what we've got in these days, and my old heart was pounding against my ribs like it seemed it could be heard outdoors. But for the life of me, I couldn't think up another single excuse. I was so upset that I didn't know whether I was coming or going.

So when that mine boss leads the way through the door, I follows him outside, my feet dragging like they were made of lead.

"We'll be all lined up and waiting for you here, Gus," some one called from inside.

"Do," I shouts back, not knowing just what else to say.

Then I staggers behind the mine boss, down the street.

It didn't take him long to get a horse for me. He headed right for Bower's general store, and picked out the best critter in the bunch that was tied outside. It was a dandy to look at, but not to ride.

The sleek, lean sorrel was mighty skittish when the mine boss led him to where I stood. I wouldn't have bet I could have stayed on his back two seconds.

"Here's one of the fastest horses in these parts," he says, trying to hand me the reins. "If he don't run down the Red Handkerchief, nothing ever will."

I took another look at the horse. He was prancing around, his front feet high up

in the air. And the ground looked awfully hard.

"If you don't mind," I mumbles, thinking to put off trying to get on that horse as long as I could, "you can ride him up to the Wet House while I go and get a bigger gun. This one's all right for town work, but not for the open spaces."

"Sure thing. I'll tell the boys you'll be there in a couple of minutes."

He vaulted on the horse and went tearing up the street.

When I got to the express office and exchanged my little thirty-two for the big forty-five which we always kept hanging in the place, I began to tell myself I'd been a fool for not trying to ride that horse—but ride it north, away from the Red Handkerchief and his gang. As it was, I was caught like a rat in a trap.

I couldn't get out of Redbug nohow, except at the head of the boys, right into the Red Handkerchief's mit. And that wasn't my idea of a Western health trip at all. By to-morrow, they'd be saying, "Poor Gus!" just like they'd been saying, "Poor Sam!" Better to have cashed out in Coney where I belonged.

But I was in it now, and I'd have to go on. Maybe I could manage to break a leg or an arm before I got too close to the Red Handkerchief's guns. It didn't appear at all impossible, seeing the horse I had to ride.

When I came up to the Wet House, weak in my knees, and as pale as a ghost, I found the boys all lined up on their horses in front, fidgeting to start.

"That was a bum horse you fellows picked," some one calls out. "He's fast enough, but you could never set yourself to shoot straight on that critter—he's too damn skittish. We sent him back and got another—not quite so speedy, but gun-broken and steady. This one trots so smooth that you can carry a glass of water without spilling a drop!"

My last hope was gone. They had a horse ready for me that I couldn't fall off of if I tried without their getting wise. And I'd been figuring on that broken arm or leg so much. It was the only thing that had held me together.

I couldn't even open my mouth to answer that fellow—I was scared that stiff. I got to wondering whether they'd send my body back East or bury me in Redbug. I could feel one of the Red Handkerchief's bullets tearing through my flesh that minute.

"Hop into your saddle, Gus," one of the boys sings out. "We've got to get moving along—the Red Handkerchief's got a big start on us by this time."

I looked at my horse and tried to move my feet. But they wouldn't budge. It seemed as if they were nailed down on the ground tight.

The fellow holding my horse brought it over to where I stood. I managed to get one foot loose from the ground and sticks it in the stirrup. Then I caught hold of the saddle and starts to pull myself up.

"Who's that coming up the street?" some one shouts. "He's coming like hell!"

All eyes went down the road.

"It's the sheriff—sure as you're born!" another squawks. "And he's riding as sober as Carrie Nation!"

In a minute the sheriff had brought his horse up in front of the bunch. He didn't look as if he'd tasted a drop of liquor in a year. His mouth was closed tight and his gray eyes seemed to look a hole through the crowd.

"Just got word about the holdup as I was riding back to town, boys," he snarled. "It's damn lucky I decided to sober up last night. I'll land that Red Handkerchief if it's the last thing I ever do. Come, boys."

"Do you want me to come along, sheriff?" I asks, faintlike. "I can't remember whether I didn't forget to lock the safe."

"You go back and look after it—quick!" he roared. "I reckon we've got enough here without you for this job."

They were the sweetest words I'd ever heard in my life. They sounded like spiffy music in my ears. I couldn't say that I was never lucky no more. And just when I'd made up my mind to a wooden overcoat.

"Sorry I can't go along," I choked, trying to hide how I felt. "I sure was figur-

ing to get a crack at that Red Handkerchief!"

"Huh!" the sheriff grunted.

Then he spurred up his horse and started down the street, the rest of the bunch following, hot-foot.

When I could see only a big cloud of dust, I strolls over to the express office, tickled to death. I'd got out of a bad jam without losing my rep. It was enough to make anybody happy.

So when that fellow, Saunders, comes rushing into the office a few minutes later, all out of breath, I was as cool as they make 'em.

"Heard about the holdup?" he gasped, running his hand through his sandy hair. "Down at Purple Rocks—the Red Handkerchief and his gang!"

"That's old stuff!" I spouted. "The sheriff's after 'em long ago—sorry I couldn't have gone along!"

"I was on the train," he went on, his hands shaking like he was going to have a fit. "They cut the engine and express car from the rest and made our men take them a mile farther on. There, they killed the crew, pulled the fires, and looted the car. I was the only one who had nerve enough to foot it into town, past that horrible sight, after they'd left. All the others started to hike to Belford, down the road, away from the Red Handkerchief and his gang."

I looked at the sweat pouring off his red face. "You must have been scared proper, Mr. Saunders—hurrying into town like this. You could have saved your wind, 'cause the Red Handkerchief and his gang would never hang around these parts a moment longer than they could help. I'll bet they're almost to the Colorado by this time!"

"It wasn't that!" Saunders frowned. "But when I came to the express car, I saw they'd dumped the safe outside and tried to blow it up."

"Tried!" I shouts. "Didn't they get away with it?"

"They did not! The safe's alongside the tracks, dented and blistered, but as sound as the day it left the factory."

"Then the Bright Lode's pay roll is still inside?" I cried. "What luck!"

"It must be! That's why I hurried—to

get you to go down and get it out. You must know the combination since you've had the safe in this office at one time."

I scratched my head. "I know the combination of the safe all right. But now I'm not so sure the Red Handkerchief's headed for the river. Seeing how he didn't get the biggest part of the swag, he might be still sticking around."

"Nonsense!" Saunders grunted. "The Red Handkerchief knows by this time that he couldn't crack one of those manganese steel safes in twenty-four hours. And it's a cinch it's too big and heavy to carry away on horses. He's given it up as a bad job! I'd go down with you myself if I wasn't so blamed tired."

I was still a little leery about going down to the car. While I knew it would be quite a feather in my cap to bring in the Bright Lode's pay money before the sheriff got back, I couldn't feel quite sure just where the Red Handkerchief was. And if I took a big gang along, they'd get all the credit—not me. I walked to the door, thinking it over.

The fellow what had charge of the little station was standing outside, looking at the sky.

"Heard anything more about the hold-up?" I called.

"No—only that they're headed for the river with the sheriff about ten miles behind. An Indian just brought in the news—he passed 'em a few miles out."

That seemed to settle the matter. With them bandits headed for the Colorado, and the sheriff tearing after 'em, I needn't be afraid to go down and open up that safe! But I didn't quite like the idea of going all alone. And Saunders was in on the thing anyhow! I turned to him.

"I'll lock up and go down and open 'er up if you'll go along. You see, I don't know just where the car is—it'll save a lot of time."

"I'm pretty tired," Saunders groaned, "but we've got to get that money into town."

"How about that light hand-car over at the station?" I asks.

"Good ideal!" Saunders cries. "Get it, and I'll go along!"

Making sure that the big forty-five was still hanging on my hip, I locked up and started for the station with Saunders following close behind. It wasn't long before we were rolling down the tracks toward Purple Rocks.

While we were pumping away, Saunders and me, things began to look fine. Even the dried-up country, with its cactuses and sand, didn't give me the willies like it most generally did.

I could just picture how surprised the sheriff would look when he got back and found the Bright Lode's pay money all snuggled up in our old safe. And the boys over at the Wet House bar—wouldn't they stare at me with big eyes while they fought each other for the turn to buy me a drink!

"There's only one piece of hard luck about this whole thing, Mr. Saunders," I says, feeling like a prince, "and that's because I didn't get a chance to give this Red Handkerchief some pointers in real, honest-to-goodness shooting. I've been praying ever since I've been here for the opportunity to call his bluff, but the sheriff had to show up just a couple of minutes too soon. And I wanted to run across that fellow so bad!"

"Not for me!" Saunders grunted, pumping hard. "I'm well satisfied to stay away from him—once is enough! You must have met a lot of bad men in your time, since you're so eager to go after this bird—and so suddenly!"

"Say," I says, "I've tamed down some of the worst bad men in this whole country of ours. Blow 'em up Gus, they calls me where they know my rep. Ever hear of Pock-marked Pat? Well, I'll tell you how I nailed him!"

Then I goes on spieling until we comes to the express car, coupled fast to the dead engine.

But when I looked about, my spiel stopped quick. I began to feel kind of sick to my stomach and as weak as a rat.

There was the engineer, leaning out of the cab, with a bullet hole through his head. The fireman was lying back in the tank, drawn all up in a knot. And before the one open side door of the express car—that green-painted box car—were the bodies of the conductor and express messenger.

The safe lay pitched out on the sand, door up, its nice shiny paint battered and burned. The sight gave me the creeps!

"Get to work on the safe!" Saunders said, nervouslike. "We want to get away from here as quickly as we can. There's no telling who may show up!"

He wasn't any more anxious to get out of that place than I was—not with them stiffies lying around! I was twisting the knob in a jiffy.

When I hit the last number, I could hear the bolts click back. Then I got hold of the knob with both hands, 'cause the door was awfully heavy lifting with the safe lying on its back.

As I got the door halfway up, I felt my gun slip out of the holster, just like it had worked loose and fallen on the sand while I was stooping over. Giving one last pull, the door dropped open wide with a bang. Then I turned to Saunders, panting like a mule.

I never got such a jolt in my life! I stood like I was made of glass. My eyes seemed to be fighting to get out of my head. My tongue was stuffing up my throat.

There I stood looking into the yawning muzzle of my own big six-shooter, held steady in Saunders's hand! His mouth was drawn tight and his eyes didn't look a-tall like they did a minute ago.

"Much obliged, Blow 'em up Gus!" he snarls. "You've helped me out of a bad hole."

"But—but Mr. Saunders," I stutters, "don't—"

"Saunders—hell!" he roars. "You wanted to run across the Red Handkerchief—and you have, you fool! I'm him!"

I was scared petrified. I tried to holler, but I couldn't make a sound.

"Even if I failed to draw the sheriff and his men down to the Springs," he went on, "this job would have panned out all right if it wasn't for that damn safe. It was too much for us! And we had already killed the express messenger, the man who knew the combination—very stupid on our part. But you've helped us out fine! I'm glad I remembered you, after we'd started on our getaway, and left the gang and circled back."

"Hailing from the East, myself, I really

hate to pull this trigger. But you'll see why I must when I tell you that you're the only one, outside of my own gang, who could identify me as the Red Handkerchief. It's simply a case of safety first! Business is business, you know! If I can send any last word in a roundabout way, I'll gladly do so."

I was down on my knees in the hot sand, my arms stretched up to the Red Handkerchief. It's an awful thing to know that you've only got a moment or two longer to live—that you'd soon be lying on the ground like those two other stiff. If you don't believe it, try it sometime!

A fellow's bound to beg for his life—can't help it. And that's just what I tried to do. Only my tongue and throat got twisted all out of shape, and at first, I couldn't let out a whine. It seemed like my tonsils was tied in knots. I drew a breath and tried again.

"Please put the gun down!" I heard my own voice, cracked and hoarse, only it seemed to be coming from the door of the express car above.

Damn that ventriloquist stuff cropping out of my throat in my last moments! And I hadn't tried to throw my voice for a year!

The Red Handkerchief wheeled around like a flash, both his eyes and the gun on the open door.

That gave me a big idea! Also a little nerve.

"You didn't think there was any one else about, did you?" my voice drifted out of the green box car. "Well, there is!"

With an awful string of cuss words, the Red Handkerchief made for the open doorway and shoved his gun inside. You had to hand it to him for his nerve!

"Come out! And come out quick!" he called. "If you don't, I'll blow you to hell!"

"Come and get me!" my voice sassed back. "I'll break this coupling pin over your head!"

Giving me one quick glance and seeing how I'd never moved, the Red Handkerchief vaults into the green box car and sends a bullet into the boxes and barrels piled in the back. Then he moves toward them, crouching like a cat.

I edges up to the car and waits until he sticks his gun and head into an open space between the boxes and barrels. Then I slides the big door shut and quick fastens the outside latch.

I didn't duck a moment too soon, for the other five bullets in the gun came tearing through the door. But I'd crawled underneath the car and was fastening the other door by that time.

Then he must have pulled out his own gun, for a couple of seconds later, more bullets came popping over my head. I rolled under the car and let him curse and shoot away as long as he pleased.

It didn't last long. He must either have run out of ammunition or got back his head. Anyway, in a few minutes, he shut up as quiet as a mouse. He wouldn't even answer me when I crawled behind the safe and called to him.

When I was sure he couldn't bother me, I reaches over the top of the safe and pulls out the Bright Lode's money bags, one by one. Then I sneaks over to the engine with them, a couple at a trip, and hides 'em in the tool box.

It wasn't nice work—having to step over that dead fireman every time. I was mighty glad when I got the last bag in the box.

As I was getting on the hand-car to go back to town for help, I spied a bunch of men coming down the track. In a minute, I saw by their blue overalls that they must be some of the railroad crowd. I figured they'd been sent down to bring the train in.

So I thought I'd wait and save myself a hard pump. They'd be all the help I needed, anyway!

While I was waiting for them to draw up, I began feeling mighty proud of myself. And you couldn't blame me! Didn't I have the terror of the whole Southwest packed away safe in that green box car? And that was more than any other man had ever done!

Then I got to figuring how these railroaders would get some of the credit, too, if I let 'em in on the dope. And that wouldn't be fair to myself at all, seeing how I'd planned and carried out the whole thing single-handed.

So I made up my mind I wouldn't spill a word about what was in that green car or the tool box till we got back to town.

The gang looked surprised when they saw me sitting on that hand-car.

"Why, if it isn't Blow 'em up Gus!" one of them shouted. "What 're you doing here, Gus?"

"Seems like it's the place for the deputy to be!" I says quietlike, waving my hands toward the stiff on the ground. "Where did you expect to find me—in an ice cream parlor?"

The men shook all over as they lamped the bodies of the crew.

"Get some fire under this boiler!" I went on. "I've got to get back to town and my arms are pumped sore."

By the time the boiler started to blow off, we had all the four bodies laid in the back of the tank, partly covered with waste. And not a peep out of Mr. Red Handkerchief since the railroaders had showed up. As the fellow who was going to do the running, climbed into the cab, some of the men started for the green box car.

I called them back—telling 'em they'd have to ride on the engine or the tank—that they might destroy some evidence if they stepped into the car. They didn't get sassy at all—just nodded and climbed up on the tank.

Then we backed down to the Rocks, coupled up the rest of the train, and headed for Redbug as fast as we could.

There was a big crowd at the station when we pulled in—about every person in town, 'cepting the sheriff and his posse. Everybody was all worked up about the holdup. They stood gaping at us with round eyes.

When the boys carried the bodies out of the tank, a hush went through the whole crowd. But after they'd got 'em out of sight, into the little station, hell broke loose.

"What 've we got a sheriff and a deputy for, anyhow?" a hoarse voice shouted above the rest. "To hand out bull in the Wet House bar! And let these killings go on right under their nose!"

"And that new deputy sticking around town when he ought to be after his men!"

another voice roared. "The yellow bum—we ought to string him up!"

The crowd started toward me, fire in their eyes.

I threw out my chest and held up my hand.

"Just a minute, gentlemen!" I says stiff-like. "Before any more of you opens up your dumb mouths, I want to give you a little surprise. It's plain you folks ain't educated to my ways of working—just used to the ordinary stuff! A few of you gents get your guns out and cover the door of that express car while one of your party opens it. Then you can talk to me later!"

They looked at me like they thought I was crazy.

"Go ahead!" I shouts. "Don't stand there gawking all day!"

"Let's see what the fool means!" a fellow cries, going to the door and throwing the hasp while the others followed at his heels, their guns in their hands. "Here she goes!"

The door slid open with a thud and I ducked low.

But I needn't have gone to that trouble.

The Red Handkerchief stood in the open doorway with his hands raised high above his head.

"You've got me!" he choked. "I can't do anything against a mob like this!"

"Who's that we've got?" some one hol-lered. "I don't know as I've ever seen his face before!"

"Why, the Red Handkerchief, you fools!" I roared. "Take him to the hoose-gow and lock him up!"

"The Red Handkerchief—alive?" another shrieked.

"Sure thing!" I spouts, looking quite cocky like. "I don't waste bullets only on real bad men—he's only an amateur! You'll find the Bright Lode's money over in the tool box."

And the crowd whooped up three cheers—three long cheers for the only man who had ever got the best of the Red Handkerchief.

A minute later, I found myself up on the shoulders of the mob, on my way to the Wet House bar.



The Devil's Flower

By JOHN WILSTACH

Author of "Forged Faces," etc.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DOUBLE ASSIGNMENT.

"SCIENTISTS and inventors are the most impractical of men," continued Chief Merritt, "I suppose because of working so exclusively in the realm of the abstract. Robinson, a great leader in biology and agronomics, immensely learned in the diseases peculiar to plants, and their organic functions, history, origin, and geography, is a child when it comes to everyday affairs. But if anything interferes with his work he is keen enough. Read this letter from him."

Merritt handed me a sheet of paper he had open on his desk.

MR. TEMPER MERRITT,
Federal Narcotic Bureau,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir—Knowing your interest in my efforts, the importance of which I trust you have not magnified, it is my duty to inform

you that I have received several suspicious visitors to my little island, presumably to buy my home and property, which will not be for sale during my lifetime.

My distrust was aroused by inquiries about the progress of my work and a general manner of unwarranted snooping. I may surmise, too, that the remarks of my visitors show they have some inkling of the end toward which my present efforts are directed.

I am alone here with an old housekeeper, Sam Bigelow, my son being away at the present time, and further inform you that he has been approached with veiled talk of bribes on his trips to the mainland for supplies.

So it has occurred to me that a young assistant, a doctor preferably, as I favor near me one trained in scientific habits of observation, would be an advisable help at present. If you can engage the services of such a man, kindly make all arrangements and rush him on directly. I do not wish to be an alarmist, but some one to act as a guard would bring about the piece of mind most necessary to intensive research.

Sincerely,

MALCOLM ROBINSON.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 10.

After perusing this letter I passed it back without comment, since the note was quite explanatory.

"You notice how timid and retiring the old chap is?" said Merritt.

"Yes," I replied, "he seems a bit ashamed of being alarmed."

"The most reserved of men," remarked Colonel Chalmers. "Yet if he desired it Robinson, who now draws an annuity from the Rockfellow Foundation, could obtain any amount of money he desired to build an extensive, modernly equipped laboratory somewhere in civilized parts."

"But he likes the quiet and seclusion he has always enjoyed up there on that isolated island on Concord Lake. He has been so much alone, I imagine, that this strange interest from strangers of which he speaks, must seem doubly suspicious."

"Concord Lake," I murmured, "I must have heard of it somewhere."

"Maybe not," replied the colonel; "there are a lot of apparently lost lakes in the northern part of the State. This one is about six miles from the village of Beechwood, New York, on a jerk water railroad running from Albany called the Valley Line. I had the dickens of a time laying out your route to get there. You start to-night."

I smiled at the fact that my going was calmly taken so entirely for granted.

No question was raised whether the assignment to protect this old scientist, striving toward the extermination of the poppy, was one that appealed to me or not. After all, the personal equation wasn't to be expected to enter in work where the individual was so submerged in the cause.

"Colonel Chalmers will give you further details, Dr. Warner," said Merritt, as if in conclusion. "The best of success to your new undertaking. I don't want any harm to come to Malcolm Robinson, and desire his work to continue uninterrupted and unmolested. You may readily see it is of the greatest importance. In an emergency get in touch with us."

We retired to Colonel Chalmers's office and the latter chuckled as he commented on Merritt's final words.

"He means don't bother us when alive,

or with spirit rappings if dead!" he laughed. "Well, one thing sure, the old boy will be silent for a week after spilling all that opium information for you. Why, you might ransack a library and not learn as much about the situation as he told you."

"Regarding Robinson, that great old scientist may, or may not, find a pestilence to destroy the poppy, but there is a chance, and we mustn't have it interfered with. I've worried my head off since we received that letter wondering how any of the dope ring knew of his efforts. I give it up. There may be danger, Warner—"

"All the better, that will but add zest to my visit," I returned heartily. "Maybe the old bird is imagining things, afraid of his own shadow?"

"I hope so. Now listen to your route as I have outlined it."

The details I jotted down on a slip of paper as they were given to me.

"I would advise that you take a revolver with you, and a supply of tobacco and books. You may need the former—I trust not—but in that lonely country you'd be lost without Lady Nicotine and reading matter. I've hunted through that country, and the supplies you find in those crossroad roads are antiques."

"Does Robinson expect me?" I asked.

"I thought the chief said he got off a letter this morning? No? Well, you may arrive before it," said the colonel, "but you can explain your presence. After a few weeks write in a guarded manner to me—at this name and address—telling me the way things are going. I don't think it is necessary for you to use a code book."

Colonel Chalmers scribbled a name and address on a slip of paper and handed it to me.

"This seems unduly careful, but we might as well be on the safe side," he explained. "If the powers that be of the dope ring actually have learned that Robinson is working toward a formula to destroy the poppy and opium at the same time, there isn't anything at which they'd stop to prevent him."

"That will only make things more interesting," I said, "but really, colonel, this danger is very vague to me."

"Then just consider your trip a precautionary measure, my lad."

He clasped me over the shoulder. "You're doing me proud," he said, "so continue the good work. By the way, your salary is credited every two weeks locally at the Brewston National Bank, so you may draw on it at any time."

I thanked him, and as we parted felt to be sure that my directions were safe in my pocket.

Leaving the government building I realized that though the situation had been explained to me quite fully, there was a lot that had been left to my own initiative.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DEVIL'S FLOWER.

AT three o'clock the following afternoon I had completed my tiresome journey, landing on the platform of Beechwood station, an old sun-blistered boxlike structure that didn't speak highly for the prosperity of the Valley Line.

Leaving Albany our train, consisting of two ancient passenger cars that would grace a museum, and a freight car labeled Southern Railroad, that I bet had long been given up for lost down in Dixie, rumbled along a bumpy roadbed at the speed of a brisk walk. Any lively snail could have had time to get out of the way, and I was the picture of restlessness by the time the conductor called out my destination.

I deposited my suitcase and boxes on the platform and looked about me for a sign that a train had pulled in, but of excitement there was none. Nor could I spy a vehicle of any description. And if there was a town of Beechwood it hadn't lived up to optimistic hopes of growing toward the station.

But as the train pattered away, swaying from side to side, I saw one human in sight. A baggage man in brown overalls was slowly gathering several bundles and a pouch of United States mail. He looked up, as I approached, with the inquisitive perk of a chipmunk.

"How far is Beechwood?" I asked. "I want a car for a long drive."

"Limpy will be along any minute. This is the first time No. 2 has been on schedule since they sent me here to repent of my sins. The town—what there is of it—is a right good spell west."

He flicked a finger over his shoulder.

I thought it advisable to wait, for I never had much confidence in rural directions.

After dumping his packages in the baggage room and locking the door, the man displayed the usual to be expected country curiosity.

"Stranger?"

"Yes," I said shortly.

"Humph. So am I, though I've been here two years. 'Tain't so bad when the summer visitors come. Sick?" He queried speculatively.

"No."

My abruptness didn't please him, but he could chew on anything.

"Well, all I can say is that any one must be either sick or insane who comes to Beechwood by choice. I told the same thing to four city fellows that came up here to go camping a week ago last Monday. They laughed fit to kill, and one of 'em gave me a drink of high-proof mule."

He looked hard at my suitcase as if trying to materialize a bottle.

"Little early for campers, isn't it?" I asked listlessly.

"Yep, that's just what I told them, but the fellow who'd handed me the drink said if I didn't mind my business he'd give me a different face. Can't even be sociable these days."

My silence must have made him sure this was so, for he wagged his head dolefully. But conversation in some folks is hard to down.

"I heard all about 'em, though, from Limpy," he said, brightening up. "They weren't sick or crazy. Must be hiding out from John Law."

"Yes," I said for politeness sake.

"Sure, anybody who camps out by that fish forsaken Concord Lake must be wanted for somethin' and so seekin' a place where they'd never be found. Or bootleggers, waiting a shipment from Canada," he suggested hopefully. "I'm going to tip

off Berryman, the State constabulary chap who comes through here every week. They're still up there, for this is the only way out."

I wondered if these were the visitors of whom Robinson had complained. My baggage man had told all he knew, and a little he didn't, I thought, for he was silent until a woebegone truck toiled up the hill to the station.

"Hello, Limpy, passenger for you. Traveling man for some casket maker, I guess," he chuckled; "but I couldn't get much out of him."

"Guess you did all the talking, Windy," said the driver, who, true to his nickname, climbed down from his seat with a lame right leg and helped me with my stuff.

I climbed in beside him and we started down the only road leading from the station leaving the railroad attaché speechless, from either rage or empty mindedness.

"I'm not going to town," I told Limpy, "but bound out to visit Mr. Malcolm Robinson."

"Oh, the old professor," he said. "Pretty lonely out that-away."

"Our loquacious baggage man told me you took four men camping out on Concord Lake," I ventured.

"Oh, him," Limpy said scornfully, "he's got St. Vitus dance of the tongue, just can't keep still. Yea, I bring supplies out to those fellows. None of my business though."

"None of mine either," I chimed in.

"If you gab a minute with Windy he has a string of lies an hour long to tell the next one who is foolish enough to listen."

"Do we pass through town to go out to the lake?"

"Yes, it's all one road," he said.

We relapsed into silence, rumbling along in that creaky machine on that rutty, clayey highway. It was a good stretch of a mile before we jogged through Beechwood, a nondescript village that had evidently seen better days.

"There used to be a big factory here in town," said Limpy, "but it moved away."

He spoke in the tone of voice of one repeating an oft told tale.

"You read my thoughts," I assured him.

"No, but everybody asks questions, so

I answer them before hand," he replied slyly, with the air of putting one over on the city fellow. "Do you want to stop for anything?"

"Not now. How far is the lake?"

"Some say four miles, others five. I call it six, but I charge two dollars anyway."

I laughed, much amused at my driver. He acted on the defensive, as though some one had once put something over on him and he was afraid it might happen again. But he was quite as chatty as his friend Windy.

"Going to visit the old professor, eh? Nice old fellow. Gets more mail, magazines, and parcels, then the rest of the county put together. Foreign stamps on some. He gives 'em to me for my kid, who's collecting. They say he has money, eh?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

Doubtless I would be the next up for discussion. Rural gossips are so starved for new material.

Uphill and down dale we rode, now and again passing an unpainted farmhouse with a barn that appeared too large for it, and a few forlorn cows. At times there were long vistas of unplowed field and meadow land once cultivated, and then second growth timber screened the way of either side of the road.

Not so much a wild as neglected, deserted countryside, was the impression conveyed to me. Some areas of the State not as beautiful as these stretches of undulating land were busy farm districts; whether from remoteness or lack of fertility this empty country was being allowed to go back to seed, and a lonely rejected aspect clung to it.

We rode and rode, until my guess would have been that we had covered upward of five miles.

"Are we nearly there, Limpy?" I asked the abstracted driver at my side.

"Yes, boss, you can see the gleam of the lake over yonder."

I followed his pointing finger, and, sure enough, from the hill we had just topped I could see a considerable body of water, for an instant, sparkling in the sunlight.

"Summer vacationers come up here later on," he remarked. "You can see their

permanent shacks when we get to the lake. But the professor, on his island, is the only one who stays in this region all the year around."

"How do I get out to it?" I asked suddenly.

How I was to accomplish this concluding part of my trip had not, curiously enough, occurred to me until now.

"Oh, the old man always has two rowboats in commission, one will be at the shore."

At a distance the possible inconveniences that a scientist of Robinson's caliber might put himself to, by living so far from a civilized center, hadn't been so apparent. Now I began to perceive them, since I would be in the same fix.

Five minutes more we were at the end of a circuitous road that finally shelved to a rough wagon path, leading down to the shore of Concord Lake, which was, I should judge, about two miles long and upward of a mile wide. There was only one island, very wooded, nearer the opposite shore, probably over ten acres in extent, looking like a dream of emerald in the distance. I could not see the house hidden among the trees, but a thin line of smoke ascending showed human habitation.

Limpy showed me a rowboat tied to a rude landing place made of logs.

"Robinson's," he explained.

I would have liked to question him on the whereabouts of the campers, but his manner wasn't unduly friendly. So I paid him the two dollars, and he surprised me by helping get my stuff into the little boat.

"The Terry Island landing is on the other side," he told me, and then helped push off, with an encouraging wave of the hand as I started to scull. It is often hard to understand, at once, rural characters you may meet; their seeming surliness is often a form of shyness.

Concord Lake was a lovely, lonely body of water, sleeping there without a ripple under the bluest of skies. The only habitations I saw were a few combined boat-houses and camps, boarded up. A hush lay over the stilly surface of the lake and the motionless woodland that bordered it, and I seemed an active intrusion into na-

ture's solitude as I rowed toward Robinson's retreat on Terry Island.

It seemed a wild stretch of probability to imagine danger breaking this silence, peaceful as a landscape painter's perfect vision of peace. The conviction grew upon me that Robinson had grown flighty and timid with advancing years. Strange, I imagined him as another Methuselah, with a beard in braids; that was the suggestion planted by the fact that every one spoke of him as old.

Not accustomed to active exercise, I was soon wondering why the island didn't draw nearer. It was farther off than I thought—or I in poorer condition. If nothing else I would row and tramp the woods, getting back into physical shape, while I was up here. I want to confess how my surroundings lulled me into fancied security.

By the time I had reached the island and skirted it for a landing place I was quite sure that I had been rowing for hours. On the other side, Limpy had told me. I rowed around a thick curtain of trees and beheld a rough stone structure lying back from the shore, and beside it sparkling light reflected from the glass of green-houses.

Not a soul in sight. I pulled up to the old float, tied the boat, and jumped out. A reception committee was noticeable by its absence.

But I had been seen after all. Ascending the beaten path toward the house the door snapped open and a spry little man in a gardener's overalls slipped out and almost skipped toward me.

"Is this Mr. Robinson?" I asked, but sure that he was not, for he didn't look very old, and hadn't the expected beard.

"No, he's inside in his greenhouse laboratory. I'm his man, Sam Bigelow," he replied. "Mr. Robinson is very busy on an experiment and can't be disturbed."

"Indeed," I said; "well, I don't know whether he received a letter or not to-day heralding my arrival? I'm the young doctor he sent for."

"Oh, yes, we heard all about you, after I came back with the mail this morning."

Perhaps my face showed surprise.

"I go every morning," he explained, "on a motor cycle I keep in a little box of a garage on the shore. Even here we get a daily paper. But let me help you with your things. I guess you can take young Peter's room—he's Mr. Robinson's son, you know—never can tell when he will show up again like a bad penny."

Bigelow leading with my suitcase, we proceeded into the house and upstairs to a plainly furnished room overlooking the lake.

"I'm going down to fix a bit of supper. Come into the sitting room when you've refreshed yourself. The master will be through any minute now. He doesn't like to be disturbed when working."

He ambled out. There was no running water, of course, but pitcher and bowl, and I washed off some of the effects of the railroad. Then I hurried downstairs, eager to meet the man I had come so far to assist. The sitting room was old fashioned and comfortable, the only evidences of study being an open, paper littered desk and two bookcases well stocked with scientific works.

Suddenly the door leading toward the greenhouse opened and a heavy-set individual in a dirty artist's smock lumbered in, his hands behind him, his majestic head, that would have pleased Rodin, bowed on his chest in a pose of reflection.

"Mr. Robinson," I said, rising.

His right hand went to his eyes, and with the left he fumbled for glasses at the end of a black cord.

"Pardon me, sir," he said, after he had secured them. "The voice—and dimly as I see without glasses—you suggested my absent son."

"I am Dr. Robert Warner," I explained. "Your man informed me you received a letter from Mr. Merritt this morning."

"Indeed I did, and I am glad that you are here," he said, clasping my hand warmly. "Pray be seated, sir."

He waved me to a chair and took one opposite me.

Robinson was a heavy-set, dignified, old fellow, about seventy, I should say, clean shaven with a ruddy complexion that spoke of the outdoors, and unusually heavy,

bushy eyebrows over tired, worn gray eyes. His hair was white, and worn long, giving him the venerable look of a patriarch. With the soiled smock one might have taken him for an aged artist.

"I don't know what you think, Dr. Warner," he said in a pleasant voice, low and cultivated, "being dragged up all this way—at the manifest whim of a foolish old man."

He smiled benevolently.

"I wouldn't say that, sir," I protested.

"No, but perhaps you may think it," he said. "Living here in such isolation you might imagine me the prey to fancies. Mr. Merritt gave you a hint of the work on which I am engaged?"

"Yes," I said, "a scientific method of exterminating the opium-producing poppy."

"Yes, the plant of the genus *papaver somniferum* of the poppy species, from whose unripe capsules the white juice is extracted that becomes opium. It is the curse of the civilized world," Robinson said fiercely.

"I am seeking by studying the fungous diseases, parasitic fungi that attack a variety of plants, to find one particularly destructive to the poppy. By experimenting with blights, mildews, rusts, and smuts, I hope I am evolving a formula of contagium that will be the death of the devil's flower."

I started at the fervor of his voice, that of an ardent enthusiast.

"Yes, the devil's flower is what I call it, Dr. Warner. The blaze of those scarlet blooms that have their roots in hell itself, symbol of the blood of their countless victims, is what I am striving to destroy. And I will do it," he exclaimed with vigor, "for my experiments are on the verge of fulfillment—I see the end in sight—and an irresistible plague sweeping over the petals that stand for the bondage of multitudes."

He seemed swept away on a wave of feeling.

Then the old man as suddenly became sober.

"I may imagine what you are thinking," he said, smiling sadly. "How does it happen that the outside world, particularly that which lives for opium, has heard of

my secret research—and why is a man of science seeking to destroy instead of to create? I believe you have a right to an explanation, doctor, since you will be here with me to fight the good fight.”

His head sank on his chest.

“I have an only son, doctor—he left here three weeks ago,” Robinson continued. “It shames me to admit it, but he is that lowest of slaves, a dope fiend—and I am both sure and afraid of two things: that he has gone back to the shackles of the drug, and betrayed the end toward which my experiments are directed to some person connected with the Inner Ring. Now you know why I am suspicious of danger following these so uncalled for visits of strangers who talk and peer and peer.”

“There was no need of your personal confidences, Mr. Robinson,” I stammered.

“I could not bear to tell Mr. Merritt, even though we are old friends, perhaps because of that reason,” he murmured. “You can naturally see how I connect my son’s continued and unexplained absence with the calls of these men, supposedly to try to buy my island.

“The excuse is absurd. And they tried to pump and bribe my servant. My boy had broken away from the narcotic habit again, but, as usual, I believe him to have been sucked back. How he happened to tell of my scientific endeavors I do not know. But I feel sure that these so-called campers are here with purposes directly connected with opium—and mean no good to me.”

“What did they say to Bigelow?”

“Nothing much—stopped him on the way to town—and mentioned they would take care of him if he would aid them and tell all he knew. Instead of entering into their schemes the honest fellow broke away from them indignantly.”

“Where are they camped?”

“Somewhere near the landing, he says. I haven’t left the island myself, you know, in months. Sam glimpsed their camp fire this morning going for the mail. He must be told to tow that rowboat back to shore, by the way. We always leave one there—my son might—”

His voice trailed into silence.

At that moment there came an interruption—a weird scratching at the front door as of the claws of an animal.

Robinson arose and advanced fearfully, then turned the knob. And a figure fell forward on hands and knees into the room, that of a young man about my own age, whose unkempt appearance, I saw, shocked the old scientist deeply.

“Father, my father, what have you done?” he moaned. “The word has gone out putting me under a ban, and all because of you. I can’t buy—beg—or steal any dope, and I must have it—I must—I must—I must!”

The screaming voice of a maniac faltered, and then he fainted at our feet.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DOPE RING’S CREATURES.

UNAIDED I picked up the body from the floor and deposited the frail form on a davenport, noticing the faint froth at the mouth from the fit of excitement that had been too much for him, together with exhaustion. I loosened the collar at the neck and chafed the wrists. In a few minutes he opened his eyes, but he lay motionless looking up at the ceiling and breathing spasmodically. It didn’t take a doctor to tell the lad was in a mighty weakened condition.

“Fortunately, Mr. Robinson,” I said, to quiet the excited father, “I brought along a simple emergency kit. I’ll run upstairs and get a dose of triple bromides for your son. His nerves are unstrung.”

The old man looked more shocked than surprised.

“You see,” he said plaintively, “they think it is a form of getting back at me to refuse dope to this poor victim—to show me what would happen should I succeed. Perverted fools! I’m only too glad they sent out word throughout the underworld that he must be deprived of the drug he craves.”

I imagined that I saw a gleam of resentment flash and fade out in the eyes of the man on the davenport, but I couldn’t be sure.

Perhaps the father and son had something to say to one another that they did not wish me to hear? Without a word I went upstairs to the room where my stuff had been carried, and unpacked the little emergency kit I had procured at the same hour I'd followed Colonel Chalmers's advice and stocked up on books and tobacco.

But when I returned with the bromide tablets young Robinson was still lying in the same position on the davenport, and the father sitting with his head buried in his hands, holding a pose that spelled dejection.

To break the spell I asked him for a glass of water.

He came slowly to his feet and went into the next room.

Young Robinson gazed at me entirely without expression, but when I lifted him up to take the nerve sedative he snatched at the pills and took the glass of water from his father's hand, drinking it thirstily.

He was breathing easily now, and I wasn't really worried about him.

Black sheep, I have noticed, have tough hides! And it was hard to sympathize with him when considering the care and torment he had been to his parent.

"How did you get over from the mainland, my boy?" asked the old man.

"Broke into a boathouse and dragged out a canoe and paddle," he replied sullenly, relaxing to a prone position. "I know the owner, it's all right. There was no boat of yours on shore. I guess you didn't want me back."

"My son, how can you suggest such a thing? You are always welcome here. Our boat was used by Dr. Warner, who has just joined me," said the scientist.

I thought it best to try to put a pleasant face on the bargain.

"I'll move my belongings from your room," I said cordially. "You know you weren't expected."

"No, and I wouldn't have come back of I hadn't been refused a deck of dope everywhere, and spent all my money," he flung out.

His father turned to him with an air of severity.

"I am glad of it," he exclaimed, "but you must have brought it on yourself by

betraying, to some one connected with the ring, the work I am on, striving to strike at the root of the evil that sprang from the land of the dragon. They *know*, and no one could have told—but you! Now they've sent you back here to harry me—though God knows you will not change by a particle my heaven sent purpose!"

Young Robinson lay silent, neither affirming nor denying, thin lips set in some sinister determination.

I wished I had not been present; unpleasant to feel the very air vibrant with discord between father and son.

Sam Bigelow broke the strained atmosphere, entering from the kitchen. He merely glanced at the figure on the davenport.

"Hello, Peter," he said briefly, and without interest "you back, I 'see. Well, supper is served. I'll set another plate."

He disappeared, and the old man laughed grimly.

"I don't think Satan himself would surprise Sam. Nothing ever gets a rise out of him. Dr. Warner, let me conduct you in to supper," he said politely.

The light had been dying softly and Sam lighted a big kerosene lamp as we entered the kitchen, Peter dragging on behind. The table was laid out simply with cold cuts and bread and tea, and I ate with an excellent appetite. After serving the food Sam joined us. I never did get the exact status of his position, somewhere between that of a servant and a companion.

Robinson tried to make conversation by asking me about my trip, but I didn't arouse much amusement with the account of my talks with Limpy and Windy, so I cut it short.

I didn't know whether or not Peter was aware that his father had appealed to the Federal Narcotic Department for a man, so I kept that fact to myself.

Sam, however, was talkative enough. He told how one of the campers had come out in the roadway and waved to him on his way in to get the mail, but he hadn't paid any attention, so he didn't know whether they wished him to stop for a message or not.

"They have some newfangled collapsible boat, looks like a tin tub," he con-

tinued. "I saw two of them playing about with it as I rowed back. I wish that I knew what they were up to. If they are sportsmen I'm an acrobat."

"Will you help me with my things, Sam?" I asked, maybe somewhat familiar.

"Quite a member of the family," sneered Peter, his first attempt at conversation.

"That will be enough from you," reproved his father. "I'm glad that our family is a small one—and your sainted mother not alive to suffer at the sight of you. If you were not so selfish you would never speak like that."

"Well, he had better watch his step!" Peter exclaimed vindictively.

"Just what do you mean by that?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing," he returned, as if sorry that he had spoken.

I would have given something to know of what his actual knowledge consisted. In any case I was sorry that young Robinson had returned. The whelp threatened to be a disturbing influence, to say the least; and now that I had met the old scientist and talked to him I had changed my mind entirely regarding his fears. He was decidedly not the type to jump at shadows, and that he would continue to be left alone to solve his scientific problem I did not for a moment believe.

Also a second sense told me that the return of his son meant something as yet unexplained. I didn't doubt that the word had gone out to prohibit morphine reaching him through illicit channels, but there was more behind his coming back to his father's roof than the mere absence of somewhere else to go.

Sam beckoned me and I followed him upstairs. We carried my stuff into a kind of attic that he showed me with apologies. But there was a bed and a bureau and several chairs, and I told him I'd be quite snug.

"I wish that young viper hadn't come back—he always shows up like a bad penny," said Sam. "He has already added ten years to my master's life. Lazy, he hasn't stirred a hand since college got too hot to hold him, yet continually whining for his father to commercialize his genius."

"Old Robinson seems a good sort," I put in.

"Best in the world, and what he doesn't know about things that grow simply isn't known. Never spectacular, he has worked mostly on government problems—and then dodged the praise. But only charlatans seek the center of the stage. You should study my master, sir, he is a truly great man."

I warmed to the loyal old fellow, who fussed about to put me at ease. Not until he had assisted in unpacking my suitcase and boxes was he satisfied, and then we went downstairs together to that divided household.

Night comes quickly in the country, and I certainly didn't expect any further excitement that first evening of my stay on Terry Island.

But sensation was not to be doled out now and again but to come in bunches, for I acted as a magnet as soon as I put in an appearance in that place of isolation.

Shortly after we entered the sitting room young Peter gruffly excused himself and went upstairs.

The prospect of being in the same house with a creature of his low moral character was not a pleasant one. The best move under the circumstances would be to ignore him entirely.

Robinson didn't seem in the mood for conversation. Like most men whose minds are set on large problems, he could express himself well when the occasion demanded it, but he had no small talk. Sam had quickly retreated to the kitchen, and I sat smoking quietly in the unfamiliar lamplight that was yellow and dim. One does not feel real silence in the city, here it hemmed us about, heavy and oppressive, and the windows were black openings into a pitch, dark night.

Hermits could have my share of this sort of existence. If there was any pleasure in being buried above ground far from habitual sounds and sights, I couldn't see it. Perhaps a man with great inner powers to draw upon might find life possible in that detached, out of the way isle, but my idea was to be nearer where life in all its phases was pulsing and beating.

I could not say that I was sorry that I had come, for I hadn't been given any choice in the matter.

This was merely an assignment, and from that viewpoint I must take it, not letting my personal inclinations enter in. After arriving at this philosophic conclusion I wondered what time we were supposed to retire? Robinson sat at his desk, deeply reflective, and I had no idea of intruding on his thoughts, not pleasant ones, I imagined, by any means.

At that moment there was a sharp knock at the door, demanding entrance in no gentle way.

I glanced at Robinson, who never changed his immobile pose.

"Let them in," he said gently. "I thought it was about time for our neighbors to throw off their clumsy disguises."

As I opened the door two burly individuals tramped into the room, rough looking customers in mackinaws and high laced boots, and boasting several days' growth of beard, which in itself alone is enough to give any one a dirty, villainous appearance.

The taller man, who must be the leader, took a seat without being asked, and his fellow followed suit. Their demeanor was one of calculated truculence.

"We called on you before, Mr. Robinson, in regard to buying this island from you. That didn't seem to be a go. Maybe our terms were too low," said the more dominant fellow. "This time we have a different proposition to present to you—and with our cards on the table."

"That's better," said Robinson. "You don't think I was fooled for a minute that you sewer rats came out here in the clean wilderness on pleasure bent. You look and act like the slums where you belong—with all that campers' get up."

"Insults won't get you anything, Mr. Robinson, and don't put on any airs in front of us—with a kid like yours in the background. But maybe plain speaking is best," said the spokesman, "we haven't got anywhere with politeness."

"Act natural if it pleases you," drawled the scientist. "Nothing you may say will have any effect in any case."

"No? Well, this is a show-down. If

you can't be made to see reason we shall order the fireworks. We were given a proposition to put before you, but maybe we thought ourselves a bit more clever. But that was no go.

"The offer forwarded to you is this: give up the scientific research on which you have been working, never fear we learned all about it, and we are ready to come through, for our principals, with a certified check for one hundred thousand dollars. Think before you turn it down," he growled, in conclusion.

Robinson, to my astonishment, was frankly amused.

"I don't suppose that I should be surprised that men on your low mental plane, frankly materialistic, think of everything in terms of money," he said, "but I do wish to hammer one fact into your brains. A true scientist cannot be swerved from his purpose by any of the influences that are known to you.

"Go back to those who sent you and say that I am going right on—and if I can make opium as much a thing of the past as the black plague of the middle-ages, that alone will make me the happiest man in the world. You are wasting time."

The smaller man turned to his companion. "Didn't I tell you, Bill," he snarled, "that money means nothing to an old bird like him. Our ways of doing a job are best."

"Yes, Shorty, you're right. We've used up enough lip with feather-duster methods," said the other, arising, with an expression of disgust. "I never believed in them, and now we can pull our own stuff. You had your chance, Mr. Robinson, so don't squeal if the going becomes hard."

He slapped his fellow on the back, and chuckled as if pleased at the failure of dollar diplomacy. I suppose he was more accustomed to the blackjack as a persuader.

I hadn't been noticed as yet, but at their departure the leader gave me a contemptuous glance.

"Is this your new nurse, grandpa?" he sneered. "Looks like one of those white-livered college boys—your son for instance."

They both laughed at this cruel banter,

and left the cottage, slamming the door violently behind them.

Robinson turned to me with a smile of relief.

"Now, Dr. Warner," he said, "you see my fears were not groundless, the imaginings of an old fellow whose brain has been turned by thinking his work more important than it is."

"But your reputation would stop any one from thinking that?" I lied.

"Oh, no, I've kept far enough in the background, but they've taken care to look up some of my more important government reports. They fear I may actually produce a working formula, but they were silly to think a money bribe would have any weight with me. Now we will have more direct methods, which appeal the more readily to these types."

"What do you expect?" I asked.

"That I don't quite know," Robinson replied, "but this island ought to be an easy spot to guard. I confess to you that I am trembling on the very instant of final success—a few hours may turn the scales one way or another. Sam and you must maintain sentry duty, starting to-morrow, warning any strangers from approaching. You have a revolver?"

"Yes, I took the precaution to bring one with me."

"Sam has a rifle he uses in the hunting season. Between the two of you I don't see why I may not be left to work in peace," murmured Robinson. "I simply must not be stopped just at this crucial period."

"I seem to have arrived in time to be of service," I said, in a pleased tone.

"This is the first occasion my wilderness retreat has proved a drawback, not a blessing. Having a policeman always within hail has some merits when dealing with those who acknowledge no law. Well, let's to bed, doctor, we are early risers here."

The old man blew out the kerosene lamp as I reached the head of the stairs and found my way to my attic. I felt a vague uneasiness, for the threats we had heard were not idle ones, and Peter might very probably enter into their plans. Don't be surprised that I slept with that revolver

I had purchased, with a smile of amusement, tucked under my pillow.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FORMULA.

THE next day dawned beautifully to my eyes, for I awoke and dressed early, up and out before any one else had started to stir from bed. A keen little breeze was whipping the waters of the lake into silver whitecaps, and the sun was shining brightly on the island, blending gold with the green of the trees that encroached on the dwelling and greenhouse.

I took a walk about Robinson's domain, finding only a small truck garden had been cultivated, and that most of the land was growing just as he had found it, a wild woodland. So it wasn't long before I had returned from the house, satisfied that there wasn't much to see, none of the gardens or walks one might have expected a dweller here would have taken the pleasure to lay out.

The greenhouse, where he had his laboratory, was to Robinson, I suppose, the one important interest of his life, the rest merely somewhere to sleep and procure necessary food.

I told myself that I would have soon grown bored with such an existence.

Already I was wondering how long might my stay be prolonged on the island. If we haven't intense preoccupations we are very dependent on others for the casual pleasure that makes up so much of life. Robinson was interesting on his pet hobbies, otherwise silent.

Sam was well enough in his way, but a servant type after all. And the company of Peter wouldn't be welcome. Perhaps I was in for a lonely time of it, unless our late callers might provide excitement in an effort to stop the scientist's experiments.

This brought up I don't know what wild notions.

I observed afterward that the natural possibility, the one nearest at hand, never occurred to a mind thronged with fancies. After all we were dealing with realists, crude ones at that.

By breakfast I was nursing a good appetite.

Peter did not come down, so Robinson and I ate together, Sam preparing hot cakes, sausages, and steaming coffee.

I started in the morning repast leisurely, but the scientist hurriedly ate a few bites, swallowed a little coffee, and then pushed back his chair and left for his greenhouse workshop.

"He's always that way when on the trail of an important discovery," said Sam ruefully, as he regarded his master's plate. "That is what I call a waste of good food."

I told the cook what Robinson had said about our keeping guard.

"Oh, well, we will do it to please him," he said, "and it is easy enough, of course, in the daytime, but we are helpless as can be at night. Anything you want, sir, this morning, when I go for the mail."

I told him I had a letter that I wanted to get off.

"Push those plates back and I'll bring you writing material and pen and ink," he suggested obligingly.

So I sat right where I was and wrote a letter to Julia. Her graduation as a licensed nurse was only a few weeks off now and by then, I wrote, we might get married. Why put off the happy day? I'm repeating this boldly—without the loverlike embellishments that do not appeal to any one save the person for whom they are intended.

I sketched briefly the situation on the island and asked her to think of me long and often. Then I signed my name, and the customary line of crosses, and left the letter sealed and addressed on the table.

The prospect of the dreary day before me made me sigh involuntarily.

"It is going to be lonely for you here, sir, but I am sure that this trouble will soon blow over. I can tell the signs when my master is within reach of triumph, for I read his moods like a book," said his faithful man, and I told him that I hoped he was right.

Then I wandered outdoors again for a spell. Shortly Sam took off in a rowboat for the mainland, towing behind him the craft in which I had arrived. The canoe

Peter had borrowed still lay on the shore where he had pulled it in.

Finding an old bench in the shade near the landing place, I went indoors for a book and decided that I'd look through Robinson's before going upstairs to get one of my own. But the scientific volumes that I scanned looked somewhat too heavy reading for me. I looked up to see the scientist bending over me.

"My son, Peter?" he said.

"Still in bed, far as I know," I replied.

He looked about him mysteriously, as if for eavesdroppers.

"Congratulate me, Dr. Warner," he said in a deep voice. "I have succeeded beyond my wildest dreams. I will not try to explain it to you scientifically, for you wouldn't understand me, but here is the correct formula for a union of certain fungous growths that will utterly destroy the poppy. I am going to hide the formula for the present here in my copy of Darwin's 'Origin of Species.'"

He took the volume out of the bookcase, inserted a few pages of closely written notes, and then carefully replaced the book in its place.

Then Robinson seated himself at the desk and started writing in a fury.

"I have a note here I want you to give to your boss when you see him. Some information I promised to give his department, of no real importance—but a promise is a promise," he said.

He wrote rapidly for a few minutes, and finished by stuffing several sheets in an envelope, which he sealed and handed to me.

"This will keep until you get back to town," he drawled.

On top of this he winked mysteriously and indicated several lines scribbled on a scratch pad:

Guard that communication with your life
and get it to Merritt. Treachery!

After I scanned this message, with puzzled brow, he tore up the little slip on which it was written into bits.

Shaking my head, I thrust the envelope he handed me into my inside pocket.

Really, the old man was acting a bit woozy, openly hiding his formula between

the pages of a book, yet seemingly afraid to speak frankly to me about a message to Merritt.

But I made no comment. If I did merely what I was told I couldn't go wrong.

My inclination was to ask him for the formula itself and rush same to Washington with the swiftest of speed, but after all he was running this show, not I.

At that instant the house was rocked with a furious explosion, a blast that hurt the eardrums. The window panes were cracking and falling. I heard a frenzied yell from the top of the stairway and Peter bounded pell-mell down the steps looking scared out of his wits. Robinson and I collided on our rush to the door. He reached it first and darted outside, but I was directly at his heels.

My confused mind hadn't groped at what had happened, but I think his had leaped directly at the nature of the catastrophe.

But in two seconds we both knew. Where the greenhouse and laboratory had stood was a tangle of ruins. The frame that had held the panes of glass was twisted like barbed wire entanglement before a trench, and the interior was a murky mass of dirt, stones, matted, torn leaves and roots of plants, and broken stands of wood. Smoke was coiling over the scene of destruction.

"It was a mercy they didn't mine the house," was all Robinson muttered as he regarded the shattered remains of his workshop of nature.

Then all at once he realized the enormity of the effacement that had taken place.

"My poor plants—my poor flowers," he whispered. "But they were too late, damn their ignorant souls. Shall the march of science be stopped by these bunglers?"

I did not reply; the shock had come so suddenly out of a clear sky.

Yet what more natural than the enemy should have used this means as a weapon?

On reflection I could see that a time bomb must have been planted by our visitors of the previous evening, which could have been accomplished easily enough, and set to go off at—I looked at my watch—ten thirty in the morning. Just at that period of the day Robinson might have been expected to be toiling in his laboratory.

Only by the merest chance had his death been averted, and I told him as much.

"A man never dies until his work is completed," he replied, the fact of his escape seeming to make little impression on him. "They certainly did a complete job, I must say that."

The smoke was settling slowly, and we could see more clearly how completely the dynamite had spelled chaos. But the philosophical spirit is often allied to the scientific, and Robinson took his loss with a composure that amazed me.

"Thought is everything," he said slowly, "the savage can destroy, it takes the civilized man to create. A modicum of time and money and all this will be as it was—if you come back here in September you will find me again among my cherished blooms seeking out the secrets of nature. The only effect this will have is to slow up my research for some months."

Strangely enough, considering his terror, Peter had stayed indoors. I did not think much of this at the time, but I remembered later.

Luncheon was a quiet meal, of which I have nothing to record. I merely wish to state that young Robinson was the first to hurry from the table, having scarcely opened his mouth, but I was glad to see the last, for a space, of his furtive, sneaky glance and ate the rest of my food with a better appetite.

After we had pushed back our chairs, Robinson and I retired to the sitting room, where the scientist again congratulated himself on the fact that he had developed successfully the magic formula before the dynamite blast had ruined his workroom.

"A couple of hours sooner and my tests would not have been completed, it may be," he said.

Speaking, he leisurely drew Darwin's "Origin of Species" from the bookcase and opened it on his desk.

As he flurried the leaves of the volume I saw by his glance that something was very wrong.

"It is gone!" I stated, with conviction.

"Yes," he admitted, and his arms dropped to his side.

Then he called his man servant.

"Sam," he thundered, "run upstairs and tell my boy Peter to come right down here."

But his son, as I feared, was not to be found.

A thorough search was made of the house and then the grounds of the island.

Peter had fled in the canoe that he had used to paddle from the mainland, and with him had vanished the poppy-destroying formula, for delivery into the possession of the opium ring by the traitor to his own flesh and blood!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MAGNET OF DANGER.

"NO, colonel, I knew there was no use of staying there on the island any longer," I said, "for Robinson's greenhouse laboratory was wrecked beyond repair and would take months to bring back into working order. Until then he could do no scientific experiments. I am sure you will agree with me that the formula he had evolved, stolen by his son, was delivered to the dope ring.

"It is my opinion they got Peter in their power through his habit. They must have cut off his supply of narcotic through illicit channels, as he said, but promised him an unlimited amount of dope if he could thwart his father's designs."

The hour was four o'clock the following afternoon, and I sat in Colonel Chalmers's office after that long trip from Terry Island, concluding my version of the happenings there.

"How do you figure Peter learned where his father had hidden the formula?" asked my superior.

"I'll tell you, colonel, at the instant of the dynamite blast the figure of the man, shrieking, appeared at the top of the stairs. I think he was hiding," I said, "out of sight, right along, and overheard our conversation."

"That sounds possible, considering the low, moral fiber of the lad. You say you have a message from Robinson for me?"

"Yes," I replied, and then repeated the words the old scientist had so oddly written for my eyes on the slip of paper, when

he so easily might have communicated to me by word of mouth.

"Excuse me for a few minutes, doctor, while I give this the closest attention," he said, when I handed him the envelope that had never left my inside coat pocket.

I strolled over to the big bay window and gazed out on Pennsylvania Avenue, the sight of people walking up and down, and machines darting in every direction, making a graphic picture that appealed to me after the country. I suppose some people are born with the city virus in their blood and never are happy anywhere else. The scene that changes with the season may be very lovely, but I prefer the ever-shifting panorama of the streets to any avenue of trees.

Washington was particularly gracious this early summer day, the city a miracle of cleanliness, an effect it is possible to obtain because of the absence of factories. I wondered whether I should be allowed to stay in the Capital awhile? I knew here was where Julia and I must spend part of our honeymoon—and that very soon. I was no poet, but the aptness of honeymoon, soon, and June appealed to me.

Though I had heard nothing to make me fearful I was a little afraid that I might be reproved for leaving Terry Island without having been ordered to do so. But I could not see how any slightest reason might be produced for remaining there.

With the bombing of his workshop, the next round in the conflict, in so far as Robinson was concerned, had been postponed at least for a few months.

Still strictly speaking I had returned on my own initiative without being summoned.

I heard Colonel Chalmers's swivel chair creak and turned from the window dreading a reprimand from him.

"Sit down, doc," he said, in a genial tone, "I have some peculiar orders for you—and you must be a good soldier and not complain because the explanations aren't really adequate. You remember Tennyson's 'Charge of the Light Brigade' and 'theirs not to reason why'?"

"Yes," I replied, "I had that poem at school. And then they dumbly rode straight to death and destruction. A little reason might have been a good thing."

He laughed at my comeback.

"Maybe my quotation isn't an apt one, but here goes anyway," he continued, with a chuckle. "You imagine, I think, that what we may call the 'case of the poppy formula' is closed for awhile, at any rate, with its theft and the wreck of Robinson's experimental laboratory. I am telling you that the case was never more lively or filled with menace—if my assumptions are correct—and you will be a magnet of danger for the next few weeks."

"I—a magnet of danger," I exclaimed.

"Yes, exactly, but you must not think that I am going to throw you into bodily peril without protection. Far from it. You will be the guarded bait that I expect will lead us to big game."

I must have looked a picture of bewilderment to Colonel Chalmers for he laughed.

"I speak in metaphors—and those should be left to the big politicians. The fact is that I have every reason to believe that you are—or will be—a marked man. Don't ask me how I know, it would be a tale too long to tell.

"Now, what I am going to order is for you to proceed to New York on a delightful vacation, with plenty of money, to see the sights and have the time of your life. From the moment you leave this building you will be followed by two of the department's best shadows, and from then on they will ever be within reach—if not call."

He paused a moment.

"Do you understand?" he said.

"No!" I exclaimed, "I'll be hanged if I do."

"So much the better," he chuckled.

I own that I was a trifle vexed. Why couldn't my superior explain clearly what was in the wind?

Colonel Chalmers suddenly became serious.

"Don't think, Dr. Warner, that I am playing any game on you," he said. "It is for the good of the department that you be used for a decoy, and that without their knowing the pointing finger is leveled by us, you come under the scrutiny of the heads of the opium ring. The less you know the better—the case will clean itself up, I am sure, with the arrest of the men

we're after—the higher ups I'm trying to tempt out of the background."

I shook my head impatiently.

"I will do what you say, of course, colonel," I put in, "go to New York and take an apartment—"

"At the Albertson, I suggest."

"And have a good time."

"Yes, between the dope ring and our Federal operators everything will be attended to without your being harmed, I trust. Here is some cash that will carry you on for a time."

He handed me a well-filled billfold which I put into my pocket.

"Remember," he cautioned, "that in enjoying yourself like a young man about town you will be obeying orders, and take good care of yourself. And don't look as if a practical joke were being played upon you, for you may find yourself the recipient of unwelcome attentions on the part of the dope ring. Luck be with you."

With a handclasp that I knew meant dismissal I left Colonel Chalmers's office feeling like a fool—and perhaps appearing more like one than usual.

What were my orders? To hie me to New York, engage an apartment, at the Albertson if possible, and have the vacation of my young life. Two department operators would follow me, and I might in some mysterious manner be the means of leading some big fish into the net.

The only possible conclusion that I could come to, and that didn't sound very sane, was that the dope ring had me marked—and that if not already marked—I was to be pointed out!

Well, I should worry.

With sights to see and plenty of money with which to see them, I might not have any cause to complain. What poor fellow who had worked hard all his life and seen pleasure on the screen in movie houses—but nowhere else—could ask more?

I wouldn't puzzle my poor brain any further trying to read between the lines of Colonel Chalmers's conversation, but just cheerfully obey orders.

Yes, they had a nice suite at the Albertson on the top floor, sitting room, bed

chamber and bath, and I could move in at once. I engaged it without asking the price, for after counting the bills in the expense purse Colonel Chalmers had tendered me, I knew the rate couldn't hurt.

My second move was to go to a fashionable tailor near Fifth Avenue and buy a couple of expensive suits, ready made, but with the appearance of being exclusive. I also purchased new madras shirts, neckties, shoes, and a soft hat, to make my outfit complete.

Wearing one of the suits out of the shop, I had the rest of the stuff sent home, and wandered back to the Albertson, where I sat down in the lobby and figured out a program of baseball games in the afternoons and shows in the evenings.

I was going to so sugar the medicine that my boss had ordered so that it would be easy to take.

Going upstairs to my suite, the word sounds very luxurious on the tongue, I wrote a lengthy letter to Julia. Graduating shortly, I wanted her to hop down to New York at once and get married. Would she do so, and when could she come? I'm sparing you—giving it in brief. It was a shame, I said, for her not to share the good times I had laid out.

After several days, during which I had enjoyed two afternoons of fine baseball games at the Polo Grounds, and at nights, the Follies and the Scandals, I received the following letter:

BOB DEAR:

You'll be surprised to learn that we will receive our certificates as graduate nurses next Monday, I shall be down at once to join you, and we shall be very happy, I am sure.

My nerves have been bothering me a lot, I don't really know what is the matter with them. I do not believe that I am suited to the tiresome, uniform existence of hospital nursing. I have lost ten pounds and look as if I had been drawn through a clothes washer.

Sometimes I get terrible fits of abstraction in which I float away like a person in a dream, and have to pinch myself to come back to reality and realize where I am. But I am sure that I shall get better when I come on, dear, with the delightful program you have laid out in your letter. It must be wonderful to be really paid for enjoying yourself. How different from a nurse's life.

Arriving at 5 P.M. Monday will you meet me at Grand Central Station and then we'll whirl to that Little Church Around the Corner I've heard so much about?

Yours,

JULIA.

X X X X X X X

Just like a woman, I thought, never letting me know before that she was nervous or unstrung.

I almost ran to the telegraph office in the lobby and dispatched a wire saying I'd be anchored with flowers at the station next Monday at five o'clock and that I was inclosing more love than a wire could possibly hold.

This was Friday. Four whole days to wait.

You can go to baseball games and shows without accompanying me second hand, so I will jump until my return from the Polo Grounds on Sunday afternoon. During all this time I may state that if Federal operators were following me they must be cute with their tricks, for I never saw any signs of being kept tab on. If, however, they followed the program that I laid out I bet they were thanking me for an excellent time of it.

Well, Sunday afternoon when I unlocked the door of my suite at the Albertson and strolled in I was surprised—but I didn't think I was seeing a wall mocking spook. In the first place it was daylight, and the tall, thin chap who sat, quite at ease, in my favorite Morris chair by the window looked very much alive.

"I've been waiting for you," he greeted me quietly, as if we were old friends, though I had never laid eyes on him before.

"So I see," I said, taken aback by his monumental assurance. "But you have the best of me."

"I am sure of it," he returned, "but don't stand there like a dummy, come in and sit down."

"I guess that I can—in my own apartment," I replied, with a laugh.

Somehow I wasn't at all afraid of the man, and didn't take him for a burglar.

"What is the meaning of this unannounced call?" I asked.

"That's our way," he said coolly.

"And a very fresh way it is."

"Oh, come off your high horse and come down to cases. I have the goods on you, and you can guess who I represent."

"Go ahead," I told him.

"You think you are smart, eh? Pretty smooth work. While you let Peter Robinson think he was stealing his father's formula himself, you slyly snatched it for your own benefit, and substituted sheets of paper containing a lot of scientific balderdash that wouldn't fool a child."

"I don't understand you," I returned.

"Oh, yes, you do. Peter Robinson saw his father place that formula in a certain book. He thought that he was stealing it, and did take some sheets of paper you left there as a blind in something like his father's handwriting. While he was deluding himself with this false hokum, you had the real formula—and you still have it. Now let's get down to cases. What's your price?"

It is needless to say that I was so dumfounded that I could hardly speak. Peter had certainly stolen the formula—whatever he might have palmed off on the dope ring.

"I don't know anything about it," I said, "and I won't discuss the matter. I will say, however, that I haven't got the formula, and haven't the slightest idea where it is. I hope that Peter gave you a dirty deal."

"So that's your game?"

"Yes," I said.

"You refuse to name a price for that document?"

"I haven't got it!" I cried.

He laughed, as if at the antics of a child.

"Well," he drawled, "we'll give you a few days to think it over. We must get the original copy of that formula so that, for one thing, scientists in our pay may study how to fight a possible effect of whatever Robinson has cooked up."

He tossed a card on the table.

"When you are ready to talk business let me hear from you," said my visitor, getting up to go.

"I'll accompany you downstairs," I insisted, and I did so, though he smilingly protested there was no necessity, and showed him out the front lobby doors.

If there were any Federal Narcotic De-

partment sleuths on the lookout, here, I thought, was their chance, for this chap was most certainly a representative of the dope ring.

The next day I called off my usual ball game, though the Giants were starting an interesting series, for I wanted to have all the time in the world to meet Julia. Also I had to make arrangements for our wedding and dig up a best man. You may be sure I picked on my one old friend in the city, Harry Garrett, now interne at the Polyclinic Hospital. He promised over the phone to meet me at the Albertson at four o'clock.

What is that old gag about the best laid plans of mice and men sometimes astray?

Well, Harry was late, of course; some doctor he was assisting with special work taking longer than he expected, so he didn't put in an appearance until after half past four.

We hustled into a taxicab, and at Fiftieth Street we were blocked, and twice on Forty-Second Street we were held up, both at Broadway and Fifth Avenue.

I could have killed the driver and sued the company—and expect to win on both counts from the jury. If I'd had a pistol I'd have taken a pot shot at the traffic policeman. Might as well walk in the first place. I grumbled and swore something terrible, but that never had any effect upon a policeman's whistle in New York.

The result was we drew up before Grand Central Station just at five o'clock.

I hopped out of the taxi, overpaid the driver in my haste, and ran into the station, Harry at my heels.

Alas, there were four trains coming in at five o'clock, and no one seemed to have ever heard of Clifton Falls. Finally I secured the undivided attention of a red cap by flashing a dollar bill, and told him my trouble.

"Train from Clifton Falls, sir. Yes, sir. Right this way. Track No. 21," he said.

By this time we had lost all of ten minutes, and I could see a picture of Julia impatiently waiting, wondering why I wasn't on hand to meet her? If a man couldn't be on time on his wedding day when could you depend upon him? I prepared at least

a hundred excuses and apologies as we hurried toward track 21.

Yes, the redcap found from another porter, my train had come into the station on schedule some ten minutes ago.

My eyes searched everywhere, frantically. There was no mistake, I was at the right gate, a little late, perhaps, but where was Julia? Surely she would wait awhile. Had she, after nervously looking for me, gone directly to the Albertson?

Back to the apartment hotel we hurried, fast as a taxi could take us, which wasn't very fast, and there my worst fears were realized. No lady, nor any one, in fact, had called or telephoned there. Nearly crazy, I went up to my rooms and paced the floor, as near a candidate for a lunatic asylum as a man could be. Maybe she had missed the train—a hundred possibilities suggested themselves for recognition.

But, receiving no counter word from Julia, I had an anguishing fear that something strange and terrible had happened to the girl I had expected to marry that afternoon. I was positive no ordinary slip-up could explain it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TRUTH!

AND I was right. After getting Mercy Hospital on the long distance telephone, I confirmed that Julia had left on the 1.30 P.M. train. A nurse friend had accompanied her to the railroad station and seen her off. So that was settled. But I had been sure, if anything had stopped her taking that train, she would have let me know. Even the prettiest and most attractive of girls doesn't break an appointment to get married without sending some word.

And now? Nothing! A blank for the imagination to fill in. Julia had left Clifton Falls on a train that had arrived in New York on schedule time—and then what?

One can't very well call up the police station and send out an alarm for a lost *fiancée*, missed at the Grand Central Station. They are missed every day, lots of places.

Alas, in a big city, every one has his own private grief, and you must have a genuine murder tragedy to draw tears from the tabloids.

Harry stayed with me, vainly trying to console my tortured spirit, as long as he could, but he finally had to go back to the hospital for an evening shift.

While he was with me I could annoy him with endless questioning, but now I was left along with a strange buzz in my brain that I was sure would drive me mad. I was too nervous to stay put in one spot, so about nine o'clock, having touched not a bite of food, four whole hours after Julia had been expected to join me, I set out for a long walk.

Several hours later I reached the theater district on my way to the Albertson just as the houses were letting out. As I saw the happy couples issuing from the lobbies I thought of the joyful evening we were to have spent together, the first of our honeymoon, and the stabbing at my heart strings never ceased.

Accompany me if you will an unhappy, distraught man, as I walked back to my rooms at the Albertson, to pace the floor and smile at the thought of sleep. That, I knew, was entirely out of the question.

For hours I walked the floor, as the saying goes, until I was physically tired and exhausted, all but the brain, and there a cycle of recurring thoughts had even brought a certain dullness from asking the same question over and over and over again.

About one o'clock in the morning I threw myself into a chair and smoked listlessly, the reaction from the excitement setting in.

Just then there was a slight tapping at the door and I rushed at it like a demon.

A man whose face was strange to me placed his finger to his lips and sidled inside.

"One minute, Dr. Warner, for your own peace of mind—if you will take my news quietly," he said. "I must explain that I am one of Merritt's men."

I looked at him with heavy eyes.

"All right," I replied, "but I don't know that you can interest me. I am sick with personal troubles."

"I know all about them," he stated,

"What!" I exclaimed, grabbing him by the shoulder. "Where is she, man? Where is she?"

"Calm down now. Didn't I say for you to take things quietly. Maybe it isn't proper for me to tell you this at all, but I couldn't bear not to relieve your suspense, knowing how you must feel."

"For God's sake be quick," I urged him.

"I must explain in snatches. You remember that wire you sent your sweetheart in Clifton Falls?"

"Yes," I snapped.

"Well, that operator downstairs is a 'cokie,' and a certain drug peddler asked him for a copy of all your wires. See? Never mind how I know. Well, by our methods it was easy enough for me to get a flash and keep the kid quiet. Get me? Well, we thought something might break, so I was down to meet that train ahead of time, my sidekick staying behind to follow you. You were late."

"Yes," I told him, "and the girl?"

"A little peach got off the train and after the crowd had cleared away I saw that she was looking about her disappointed as could be in not being met. She seemed to be searching for some one in a dazed way, as if half out of her mind. Then a young chap approached her, and I heard him ask if she were waiting for Dr. Robert Warner? 'Yes,' she said. 'I've been sent for you,' says he, 'as the doctor has been detained.' And they went off together."

"You followed," I gasped.

"Of course—that's my racket. Well, I was led right toward a house we've had under suspicion for a long time as dope headquarters, and there I am sure your girl is held captive."

"And you stand there and tell me that? Give me the address! The police—" I trailed off.

"Slow does it. If they took your girl there, it must be to get you to follow. There's no motive in actually harming her, you can see that. And no use for us to raid an empty trap. The place is under constant surveillance, and when the right moment comes we will act."

"But we want the big guns there when we do so, savvy? I'm dead certain you'll

hear by to-morrow—and if they try to draw you there—act like a mark and go! Remember we have a big squad handling this—and you're the bait for the men higher up."

"Why?" I asked numbly.

"Because they think you are the thief who stole the copy of the formula, Robinson's secret for wiping out the poppy! Now I'll leave you, kid. I am sure you may expect some action to-morrow. Brace up and face the music. It's all in the game."

I made an attempt to thank him, knowing this the right thing to do under the circumstances, but the effort was a feeble one. The callousness of allowing Julia to be used merely as another pawn in the game made it hard for me to do so. But I realized that I was quite helpless, and that it was useless for me to attempt to rush events—I could but wait and try to muster a little patience.

However, though I now knew Julia was a prisoner, after the man left me, I really felt better than when in the dark of uncertainty that had clouded my mind.

I won't say that I actually slept that night, but I did snatch a few winks before dawn, and then, oddly enough, I fell into a dreamless slumber until nine o'clock.

Arising I tubbed and shaved, just as physically tired as if I had been up all night working, so does the mental react on the body.

The phone rang and I picked up the receiver.

"Dr. Warner? Yes? We assume you want to see your sweetheart, Julia Senton. Well, obey instructions absolutely. There is now a closed red touring car parked in front of the door. Come downstairs and enter it without going to the desk, or speaking to a single soul. Obey these commands or you will never see your girl alive again."

I heard a click as the phone was hung up on the other end.

Dressing hurriedly, I took the precaution to place my revolver in my back trousers pocket, and took the elevator downstairs.

Yes, I would certainly follow orders without question: every one on both sides of the fence, in the dope ring and the Federal narcotic service, seemed to know

what they were doing, aside from me, so I would dangerously drift with the tide.

Sure enough the big red touring car stood parked outside the main door. The driver tipped his hat as I stepped inside the tonneau. The curtains were drawn, but as the machine didn't turn around I had the impression we were going uptown. We rode for about twenty minutes, stopping with a lurch that nearly threw me out of my seat.

The driver opened the door of the tonneau and asked me to follow him. We were on one of those indistinguishable streets that leave no impression on the memory, and the brownstone house we entered was similar to many in the row. Evidently we were expected, as the door was opened by a butler in uniform.

"Come right upstairs, sir," said the driver politely, and I followed.

I had done as requested by Merritt's operator, walked right into the lion's den, but let me make no excuse; at the mention of my Julia I would have done so in any case.

As I turned the banister on the next floor, playing follow the leader, I felt a hard object in my back that felt like only one thing—there is never any doubt about a revolver.

"Here is where we check your hardware," a low voice said, and my back pockets were patted for a weapon, and I was relieved of the one I carried. "Now march straight ahead of you into the front room."

But the revolver was still pushed into my back, and I felt a man's breath on my neck. All this without looking around.

The room into which I strode was occupied by four men, all wearing masks. The fellow who had frisked me also wore one, and the total effect was the odd one of a masquerade in daylight. But it was all for my benefit—the curtains, I noticed, were tightly drawn.

"Sit down, Dr. Warner, and make yourself easy. We don't mean any harm," said one of the masked men, who, by his manner, I took to be a leader. "In fact we never resort to violence unless it is absolutely forced upon us."

I thought I would play stupid. "This is all very strange," I said. "Hardly do I get out of bed than I receive a telephone call to come here if I wish to see my *fiancée* alive again. What is the meaning of this? I would like an explanation—and I beg of you to bring her to me."

"The answer is a simple one, Dr. Warner. We have detained the young lady here, against her will it is true, merely for the purpose of having you visit us. We knew her presence would be a strong argument," he said. "Now that you are here we have the privilege of asking you a few questions—about that formula you stole."

I sighed.

"Is there any reason to go over that?" I asked. "I have told one of your representatives I haven't got it."

He laughed gratingly.

"We want the truth—and we are going to get it! There are more ways than one, doctor; you should know that."

His tone was oily and cruel.

"Torture!" I exclaimed. "I warn you that you can get nothing out of me that I do not know—not if you push red hot needles up my finger tips."

"Why, doctor, I am surprised at you, even suggesting such old-fashioned methods of extracting information. A modern man like you, surely conversant with the newest tricks of your trade. No, we are going to use a scientific means to make you tell what you know. Call the doctor."

Another masked man entered the room, and I noticed that he carried a hypodermic syringe in his hand.

"Dr. Warner," said the "mouthpiece" of the gang, "did you ever hear of scopolamine, or hyoscine?"

"Yes," I replied, "it is used in 'twilight sleep,' to keep the patient from remembering what happens afterward."

"And have you heard that it has also been secretly used in third degree methods by the police to get at the truth when suspects won't talk? That it deadens the imagination, and removes apprehension, so that a man can't think of anything except the bare facts of *what has actually taken place*?"

"This is all possible," I admitted.

"Well, we are going to shoot you with a dose of morphine to benumb your nerves and the scopolamine to kill your imagination. Then you will answer, truthfully, certain questions whether you wish to do so or not."

The man with the revolver held it level with my forehead, while I was roughly helped off with my coat and my right sleeve rolled back.

Then I had to submit to a terrific injection—I imagine I could feel it coursing like fire through my veins.

"I can't tell anything I don't know," I whispered stubbornly, "and I did not steal that formula."

The masks on the faces seemed to dance before my eyes and I blundered into darkness.

When I awoke, or came to would be a better expression, I thought I must be in a standstill in some wonderful dream, all too wonderful to be true. I was back in my apartment at the Albertson, lying in my bed, and Julia, more beautiful than ever to my eyes, was bending over me. I felt no impulse to move, save to take her hand, for I was as weak as a kitten.

"Julia, my dear," I whispered, "is this all real—or will I pinch myself and wake up?"

She kissed me, and I knew *that* was true.

"I don't understand, dearest," I went on. "The last I remember I was forced to undergo a terrible truth experiment and—"

"Your friend, Colonel Chalmers, will explain," she said, and that lovely voice in my ears was hers, I knew.

Then I saw my old boss sitting there big as life at the foot of the bed.

"It's a wonder they didn't kill you," he said savagely. "We had the devil and all of a time bringing you back to consciousness. Whatever it was they gave you it must have been a tremendous overdose—"

"Yes, I know," I said hurriedly. "They gave me scopolamine to try to find out about the formula. I remember going out—and that's all. What happened?"

"We knew that the heads of the opium ring were all gathered there at headquarters

this morning, not trusting each other any too well," said the colonel, "when such an important prisoner as you was to be given the works."

"The house had been surrounded since dawn by a big squad of our men, as well as city detectives. A half hour after you showed up we sprung our raid—gathered in the most important of prisoners and documentary evidence that will lead to some great hauls of dope."

"They couldn't get anything out of me in that half hour," I said feebly. "I could only tell them—if anything—that Peter stole the formula."

"*But he only thought he did!*" exclaimed Colonel Chalmers.

"Then what happened to it?" I asked. "Who else could have taken it out of that volume of Darwin's?"

"I have the formula," said the colonel triumphantly. "Old Robinson fooled his son and you, too, having you bring it to me without your knowledge."

He drew a letter from his pocket.

"This is the note Robinson wrote under your eyes. Listen to this:

DEAR CHALMERS:

My son is listening at the top of the stairs—so I have pretended to hide my formula in a copy of Darwin's "Origin of Species." Instead I have placed there a hash of scientific words. Peter will certainly steal that for the dope ring, but give me time to get the real formula on to you, by Dr. Warner. You will find it inclosed.

"There is more, but that's all bringing news to you. I never told you, doctor, because I thought it best for you to be in ignorance—you couldn't tell what you didn't know! They thinking you a thieving young doctor, I felt sure you could be used as a bait to draw us to the higher-ups of the dope ring. But I didn't expect to have you nearly killed in doing so."

"I'll be all right now, doctor," I said, clasping Julia's hand. "Get your old formula under way to put opium off the face of the earth—there are other drugs for the narcotic squad to work on—but not for me until we have a vacation honeymoon—at last—at long last!

THE END



The Enchanted Week

By HOWARD ROCKEY

"**H**ERE she comes again!" giggled Gladys Moore. "Isn't she a chromo? Like a comedy grand duchess in a slap-stick film!"

She glanced across the counter, over the shoulders of customers, toward the ornate entrance of the bargain emporium.

"Gladys, you shouldn't make fun of her!" Mary Horton reproached the girl, whose tawdry finery and freakish bob gave her an air of insolence that her manner accentuated.

Mary was provoked by the smile on Gladys's pert rouged lips. Gladys ridiculed everything that was not ultra modern and blatantly up to date. She mocked the simple tastefulness of Mary's modest frocks, and the fact that her wealth of chestnut hair never had been shorn.

"The old dame's cuckoo!" Gladys shrugged. "How does she get that way? Putting on such airs! You might imagine she thinks herself dolled up like Astor's pony." There was a sneer in her impudent eyes as the feeble old figure drew near.

Mary watched the latter fascinated. She found nothing ridiculous in the visits of the

woman the other girls had facetiously dubbed "Old Lady Five-and-Ten." Mary was wondering who she was; what her history might be. No doubt there was faded romance somewhere in her past.

Tall, gaunt, aristocratic, Mary thought her pathetic in her shabby black silk dress, and the rusty antiquity of her feathered hat. Her long silk gloves showed finger-holes in spite of many darns.

The high buttoned shoes that peeped from the folds of her full length skirt were cracked and down at heels. Yet there was dignity and poise in her every movement.

A great lady of a bygone age, whose fortunes must have dwindled, and whose family was no doubt dead. She seemed as anachronistic as a harpsichord in an orchestra of saxophonic horrors.

Once each week, on Tuesday, the eccentric old creature arrived at the store in a taxicab. Its chauffeur waited for her while she swept across the sidewalk, holding up her train, and made a majestic entrance. It was obvious that her thoughts were back in the days when she had been wont to shop from her private brougham.

She would wander from counter to counter, inspecting the wares that were offered for nickels and dimes. Courteous, but haughty, and dreamily aloof, she ignored the other customers; viewing the various articles through a tarnished gilt lorgnette.

Bits of lace that appealed to her were purchased with the meticulous care that might have been spent in choosing a piece of fine rose-point. Lengths of silk and trimmings, handkerchiefs and children's toys, received equal consideration.

It was always a question what use she could have for them. She never wore the glittering braids or imitation jewelry that she picked out as deliberately as though the store was one of the most exclusive shops in town.

Mary wondered about her selections every time she watched her—all except the little toys. Some child, no doubt, received them, and the pale gray eyes of the shopper would glow as she fondled dolls and little boats and fuzzy animals. Her wrinkled face would wreath with smiles when she bought these playthings.

She was approaching the counter where Gladys and Mary stood. Overhearing what the girls had said, the crowd that was fingering the trays, turned with a curious interest as the old woman came up.

There was an array of earrings, pendants and chains—gew-gaws that were deceiving in everything but price. Well-to-do women often came in to pick up these ornaments. Old Lady Five-and-Ten looked at them as though they were really precious and not clever shams.

"Do you suppose she thinks they're real?" Gladys laughed, and turned to Mary.

The truth never dawned on Gladys. The old lady, of course, knew perfectly well, what sort of jewelry it was. She was living in the past, purposely pretending that she was back in the luxurious atmosphere of an atelier devoted to rare and precious stones.

"Of course, she doesn't!" Mary hoped the old lady had not heard.

It was obvious that she had. The out-of-fashion lorgnon was haughtily leveled at Gladys.

"Young woman," she said in an icy tone,

"I'm quite accustomed to telling the genuine from pretense. Jewelry, like breeding, has qualities which cannot be counterfeited."

Gladys gasped and gaped at her; rouged cheeks growing redder. There was a titter from the group gathered in front of the counter.

Speechless, Gladys stared. Her lips were moving soundlessly and her eyes were blazing. She saw the department manager sauntering down the aisle. Whatever smart impertinence might have occurred to the girl was banished from her mind.

"Will you please have this wrapped for me?" Selecting two cards that held jet drops, the old lady passed them to Mary. Then she gestured with her lorgnon, and the manager paused beside her.

"I wonder," she asked, "if you would mind taking these packages out to the car and leaving them with my chauffeur?"

Used to her visits, the manager bowed and accepted her tiny bundles. Without a word he went to the street and found her waiting taxi.

There was no self-consciousness in the calm expression of Old Lady Five-and-Ten. From a beaded bag that was badly frayed, she took a purse of discolored mesh and found two ten cent pieces.

"Thank you, my dear," she beamed, as she handed them to Mary. Then she walked to the door with leisurely dignity.

II.

AFTER that morning, whenever she came, as usual every Tuesday, Old Lady Five-and-Ten would stop and nod pleasantly to Mary. She had on the jet drops she had bought—the only article of her choice she had ever been seen to wear.

"Do you think them becoming?" she asked. "Or am I too old to fancy that I look well in them?"

"They're lovely against the white of your hair," said Mary truthfully.

She was thinking how soft and pleasant the woman's low voice sounded. Mary wondered what she would look like if she dressed herself in the mode of the average modern woman of no greater years. Some-

how, Mary felt that this would spoil Old Lady Five-and-Ten.

However, she was busy, and thought no more of the shopper until a commotion told her something was the matter. It was warm outside, and the atmosphere of the crowded store was oppressive. Some one had fainted, no doubt.

"It's your high-hat friend," Gladys announced, peering through the crowd. "Wonder if Mr. Grimple has any smelling salts! Home, James!" she burlesqued the gestures of Old Lady Five-and-Ten. "That's what comes of shopping among such *ordinary* people!"

Mary was furious at her. "It's a shame! The poor old thing!" Then she heard her name.

"Mr. Grimple wants you," some one said, and Mary left the counter.

The manager stood behind a chair, holding a glass of water. Looking pale as death, yet smiling with apparent gratitude, Old Lady Five-and-Ten looked up as Mary hurried over. Mr. Grimple was beckoning.

"Miss Horton," he bowed. "I wish you would see this lady safely home."

"You're very kind," the old woman said. "If you'll just help me to my cab."

He did, and Mary went with them. She made the old lady comfortable against the leather cushions.

"Where shall I tell him?" Mary asked, as Grimple held open the door.

"The chauffeur knows," came the answer. "It's sweet of you to go with me."

"I'm glad to," Mary answered. The cab moved through the traffic. "Do you feel all right?"

"Just a little giddy. I shall be myself quite soon." Then she sat very quietly, staring out of the window.

It was not as though she saw the throngs and the maze of buses, trolleys and cars through which the taxi threaded. Her thoughts seemed far away, and she listened as though she expected to hear the clatter of horses' hoofs. Old Lady Five-and-Ten forgot that she was not in her own brougham.

Mary made no effort to break in on her silence. A natural curiosity gave her a little thrill. She was going to see where

the old lady lived; find out who she was. She felt it would be like looking back through some long forgotten book of social history.

The cab continued down Chestnut Street, turning south at Eighth. It paused before a big brick house just after it turned into Pine, a once proud mansion whose worn, white steps were discolored and chagrined at the present humility of the former residence.

A sign on the pillared doorway, with Colonial fanlight, announced that it was a boarding house—that there were vacancies. The departed grandeur of the place seemed appropriate to Mary—also a trifle pathetic.

"Will you pay the man, my dear?" Mary found the worn mesh purse thrust into her hand. "Give him something for himself. He is very good to me, and I always ask for him."

The chauffeur was a clean-cut chap. Mary saw that he was interested in his aged fare. He and Mary helped her into the vestibule. From the black silk bag appeared a key. Mary unlocked the door.

"Next Tuesday at ten," the old lady said, and nodded to the chauffeur. Then she went in with Mary.

The place was musty and dingy, and the hall was dark. An odor of stale cooking mingled with that of dust. The carpet was worn and threadbare and the once rich paper on the walls was badly streaked and cracked.

Old Lady Five-and-Ten gave these things not the slightest notice. From her manner, the once magnificent home might have regained its grandeur.

"Come in, my dear." She opened a door at the third floor back. "Thank you so much for helping me—and do sit down and rest. You see, I live here quite alone, but this room is full of memories. It's furnished with my things."

It was certainly full of antiques. A haircloth sofa, a walnut bed, and chairs that must have dated from the old lady's youth.

All about were knickknacks, photograph albums and books. A copper kettle and china cups were on a carved tea-stand. In the corner stood an old leather trunk.

Mary was crazy to ask questions; but, of course, she knew she mustn't. In spite of her kindly manner, and sincere appreciation of Mary's coming with her, the old lady's hauteur forbade any presumption of prying into her affairs. Mary had not forgotten her effective rebuke of Gladys.

"I wish you could stay to luncheon with me." Mary thought the invitation was more courteous than meant. No doubt the old lady's pride would have blushed at taking her guest to the dining room of the boarding house. Mary wondered how she stood the place. Her own was better than this!

"I'd like to," she hastily declined. "But I must get back to the store—that is, unless you need me."

"Mercy, no! Don't think of me! But you will come again? I want to know all about you—and it may be that you'll enjoy looking at my treasures."

"Oh, I'd love it!" Mary exclaimed.

She left with the promise to be there at eight on Thursday evening. Impatient, she could hardly wait for the time to come. There was some delicious mystery about Old Lady Five-and-Ten. Mary was keen to solve it!

III.

It was a fascinating evening that Mary spent in the quaint little room when she went to call. She had said nothing at the store of her invitation. The other girls would not understand her longing for the society of this lonely woman.

Dressed in a lavender brocade, trimmed with yellowing lace, Old Lady Five-and-Ten was indeed a picture of rare charm. The striking contrast between the two exemplified the changes that three generations had wrought.

Mary thought that perhaps she disapproved of her short skirts and high-heeled pumps, and sheer-clad slender legs. Yet Mary's costume was almost prim compared with the average girl's. In any event, the interest of her hostess was undoubted.

Mary learned the old lady's name. She was Mrs. Sabina Brayton, and she had no relatives. As a child, she had lived in the neighborhood, and had played in this very

house. That was why it seemed like home to her, in spite of changed conditions, and the obvious poverty in which she found herself. No doubt her meager income was stretched to its utmost limits to indulge her curious fancy for shopping fashionably.

"Now you must tell me about yourself," Mrs. Brayton requested.

"Really, there isn't much to tell," Mary said diffidently.

From a quiet Pennsylvania town, she had come to Philadelphia. Her father had been an organist in a small church at home. Her mother had died in her infancy, and with her father's passing, Mary was left alone.

Her education had been good, and she had a taste for music. But, she explained, her talent had no commercial value. Knowing nothing of stenography, or, in fact, of business, she had found a place in the five-and-ten, where she had been two years.

"No young men?" asked Mrs. Brayton. "Surely a girl as pretty as you should have a host of admirers."

"I'm afraid not!" Mary flushed. "I did go out with some of the girls—until I grew tired of it."

She had not liked the sleek young men who were Gladys's friends. She enjoyed a dance, but she did not care for blatant halls and the cheaper cafés where there were public floors. There was something in her make-up that aroused her sympathy with Mrs. Brayton's pretense.

She, too, would have liked to live the life of which Mrs. Brayton dreamed. Not that she was a little snob, or had any false illusions as to a fairy prince. No doubt, one of her forbears had been to the manor born. Mrs. Brayton seemed to sense it. That was why she liked her. It stirred a camaraderie that served to draw them closer.

"But you're far too young to miss the fun a girl of your age should have! You won't be more than twenty? Why, when I was your age, there were parties and beaux and perfectly glorious times!"

Was there a romance—a tragic one—in Mrs. Brayton's life? Mary felt sure of it. It was restful in the little room, with the pleasant white-haired woman.

Mary formed the habit of dropping in as

often as she could. From the old leather trunk came the treasures of Old Lady Five-and-Ten. The top was filled with the senseless things Mary had known her to purchase. There, too, were the poor cheap toys she had bought with such pleasure and emotion.

"I never had a child of my own—always wanted one." Mrs. Brayton noticed Mary's wonderment. "Do you think me silly to play at having one? But then, my life is nothing else but a make-believe. Perhaps, when you are older, you may understand."

"Oh, I do—I do!" said Mary. "I think it's wonderful—to be happy in spite of everything—to pretend that everything you want actually is yours!"

"Reality's better!" the old lady snapped. "But then, you'll *live* your happiness—instead of imagining it."

The trunk gave forth a variety of sentimental things. Old satin slippers with buckles, yellowed but glistening; souvenir programs and flowers, faded, pressed and crumbling. There were feathery fans and brooches, two leather-framed daguerreotypes made when Mrs. Brayton was a *débutante*.

"I wore that gown when the Prince of Wales came to Philadelphia."

"You mean that you danced with him?" Mary asked, half incredulous.

"Mercy, yes!" said Mrs. Brayton. "But not the good-looking stripling that you have in mind. My prince became Edward VII. Oh, don't open your eyes so wide! I didn't fall in love with him, and I dare say he never thought of me after that one waltz. Here's something, though, that you must have!"

She handed Mary a Spanish comb, an exquisite high-backed shell of unusual beauty. "Let me see it in your hair. It makes you adorable! This bobbed-hair generation can't wear such attractive things!"

It went on that way night after night, and it seemed to Mary as though she led two existences. One the practical everyday routine of the store. The other, the evenings she spent happily in the atmosphere of pretense.

She fancied herself as a part of the life that her elderly friend recalled. She thought

she enjoyed it quite as much as Old Lady Five-and-Ten.

But gradually, Mary became aware that Mrs. Brayton was failing. There were times when her mind seemed in a haze, and the things she said to Mary gave rise to the knowledge that she supposed she spoke to some one else.

At first this frightened Mary. Gentle as Mrs. Brayton was, it made her feel creepy to be alone in the room with her. Nevertheless, it was evident that Mrs. Brayton needed her now, and she made more frequent visits.

One evening the old lady's face was flushed and her eyes glassy. Mary realized that she was ill and in need of a physician. She suggested it at once.

"I've no money for doctors!" Mrs. Brayton shook her head. "But, my dear, if you don't mind, you might help me into bed."

Mary did and went downstairs in search of Mrs. Trough, the slovenly proprietress of the boarding house.

"I'm going to send a doctor in, and she's got to see him!" Mary explained to her. "I'll arrange to pay him; but you mustn't let her know."

"Poor thing!" sighed Mrs. Trough. "She's a likable old darling, but somehow off her head."

"That will help us," said Mary. "We must make her think she's living in the days she dreams about. You pretend you're her housekeeper, and I'll tell her I'm her niece."

"You're good to her!" exclaimed Mrs. Trough. Then she grew suspicious. "Maybe you think she's a miser—that she's rich and when she dies—"

"Don't be absurd!" snapped Mary. "You go up and talk to her, and tell her the doctor's coming. Don't forget that she owns this house—that things are as they used to be in the past she's been living in."

Then she hurried up the street in search of a physician's sign. She found one and went in. The medico was a middle-aged man who listened with curious interest. How she could manage to pay him, out of her meager salary, Mary was not certain.

However, she had a little stake in the savings fund. It would be worth depleting to help Mrs. Brayton.

She told Dr. Drake the story and begged him to promise to help. "Of course, I will," he told her. "But I'm not sure that your plan is wise. There may be a sad remembrance, somewhere in her past. To imagine herself back in it, might not work out as we hope."

IV.

For the next ten days Mary moved in a fever of excitement. Every morning she phoned Mrs. Trouth. Each evening she hurried from the store to Mrs. Brayton's bedside. She only went home to her boarding house when it was almost midnight.

She did not breathe a word about it to any one in the store. Not even when Gladys Moore remarked on the Tuesday absence of Old Lady Five-and-Ten.

Then, one morning, Mary gasped as she opened a legal envelope she found at her breakfast plate. A firm of strange attorneys had written to advise her that a cousin of her father's had died and left her a thousand dollars. If she would present herself at their office at her convenience, the money would be paid her.

At first she could not believe it. It seemed like a fairy tale. Her convenience proved to be noon that day, and when she was back in the store again, Mary had ten hundred-dollar bills tucked safely away in her stocking.

A thousand dollars! Her thoughts ran wild. Smilingly she figured what the sum would buy in the store. Twenty thousand nickel articles; ten thousand at a dime!

But she didn't mean to spend it like Old Lady Five-and-Ten. The pleasure she would get out of it would be real, not make-believe. Wasn't that what Mrs. Brayton herself had prophesied.

When Mary arrived at Mrs. Trouth's, Dr. Drake was leaving.

"Well, well!" he said. "How happy you look! You must expect good news. Luckily, you may have it. Our patient's progressing splendidly. She'll be out in a day or two. If we could only get her away she'd be herself in no time."

"What about taking her to the shore?" Mary had an inspiration. She could get a vacation for a week.

"Splendid idea!" agreed Dr. Drake. "Some little hotel or boarding place, where there is heat and the food is good. It would be the making of her."

Mary said nothing of it that night, but when she had slept upon her plans, she explained them boldly to Old Lady Five-and-Ten. They would go to Atlantic City, to the Hotel Diplomat.

"We'll pretend that I'm your ward—that you're chaperoning a *débutante* who's resting from the nervous strain of a furious social season. You must have shoes and hats and gloves, but I wish you'd wear the gowns that I've seen you in. They're so much more aristocratic than anything new would be. I'll fit myself out to look the part, and we'll have a wonderful time. For one whole week we'll actually live the world of make-believe!"

There were tears in Mrs. Brayton's eyes as she slowly shook her head. "You don't know what you're saying, my dear. I couldn't think of it. It's a handsome thing you offer—sweet to put it as you do—but you must keep your money for a rainy day."

"Oh, no, I mustn't!" Mary laughed. "'It ain't goin' to rain no mohl' Can't you see it's what I've been longing for, and never hoped to enjoy? It isn't just that I want you to go—although, of course I do. I want to go myself—more than anything else in the world I possibly could have. Don't you see that you've taught me what fun it is to pretend? This would let us play at being rich, and we'd have a perfect lark!"

Mrs. Brayton was obdurate but Mary was persuasive. In the end she had her way. Then, like two children, they made their plans for their week of masquerade.

Each evening Mary brought new frocks that she had bought for herself. They were inexpensive things, copies of costly models. Mary was charming in them.

Then Old Lady Five-and-Ten went out in a taxicab. This time she went to different stores, and sparingly selected the things that Mary insisted she must add to her scanty wardrobe.

They hugely enjoyed their little plot; impatient for the Saturday when they

should go to the shore. Mary had written, reserving rooms for her aunt and for herself. Their arrival impressed the hotel clerk and the guests in the ornate lobby. Quiet and unassuming, with an unmistakable air, there was no doubt that these two were true aristocrats.

Upstairs, they giggled as they unpacked, and Mary changed from her traveling dress to a smart knitted sports suit. She also hung up the three evening frocks she had purchased ready made.

There wasn't going to be much left when she paid that doctor's bill! But this wonderful, enchanted week was going to be worth the price.

Happily enjoying the secret that no one suspected, Mary and Old Lady Five-and-Ten held themselves aloof from the other guests. Not that Mary did not notice the admiring glances of several youths who watched her whenever she appeared. Of course she liked the homage their eager eyes expressed; but she refused to let them be introduced when the hotel hostess asked if Mary cared to dance.

"Thank you, no," said Old Lady Five-and-Ten, declining on Mary's behalf. "My niece is recuperating—avoiding all excitement. We are really here to rest."

That dashed the hopes of the youths who had begged the hostess to present them. Mary thought her attitude pleased one dark young man. He was sitting with a book and a pipe in a chair a little apart from the disgruntled group.

He was apparently a stranger, alone at the hotel. Mary had caught him several times looking in her direction. He had always dropped his eyes when he saw that she noticed him.

During dinner Mary saw that he was at a table by himself. She liked the cut of his dinner coat, his smoothly brushed back hair, and his studious expression. If she had cared to meet any man, he was the one in the whole hotel who would have appealed to her.

Looking up as she ate her dessert, she observed that he had gone. If Mrs. Brayton was aware of her interest in the chap, she made no comment on it.

Stepping into the lift, to go to their

rooms, Mary flushed as she recognized the same man in the car. He moved aside with deference, and did not look up at her.

Slowly the car moved upward. Then it stopped abruptly, halfway between two floors. Somehow the mechanism was jammed. They would have to stay where they were until it could be fixed.

"Nothin' to be frightened about," the negro operator reassured them. "The car won't fall, and the engineer will fix us up right smart." But "right smart" extended itself over more than twenty minutes.

Mrs. Brayton sat in the narrow seat at the rear of the cage. The young man stood facing Mary, blushing and embarrassed. He wondered if Mary imagined that he had somehow planned this accident with purposeful intent. She was wondering why he did not climb out through the roof of the car.

Mrs. Brayton relieved the awkwardness by speaking to him.

"Since we seem to be neighbors for some time, we hardly need be formal," she remarked pleasantly. "I hope you've no engagement."

"Luckily no—or unluckily," he answered, and glanced at Mary. She smiled frankly back at him.

"I am Mrs. Brayton. This is my ward, Miss Horton."

"I'm Allan Kane" He thanked her. "You're from Philadelphia?"

"Yes," said Mary, and he explained that he was from New York. "I'm with Ruthven, Boyd and Ruthven," he mentioned the name of a legal firm of the highest standing.

For the next ten minutes they chatted on about nothing of any moment. Then when the car slid to its floor, Mary uttered a frightened scream as Mrs. Brayton fainted.

V.

Two hours later Mary and Kane were in a rolling chair. The boardwalk breeze was bracing, and a new moon silvered the sea. Old Lady Five-and-Ten was asleep in her hotel room.

Kane had helped Mary carry her from

the elevator. It had been nothing serious, and Mrs. Brayton had been firm in her insistence that Mary should go and take the air. Nothing loath, Allan Kane had asked if he might accompany her.

To Mary it seemed that the roller chair must be *Cinderella's* coach. She must not step out of her rôle of the weary débutante.

He talked of theaters, polo and golf, and mentioned names of prominent folk that Mary remembered having seen in the social notes. If she could only have told him the truth, she would have enjoyed herself. As it was, she felt wicked, like some unscrupulous adventuress deceiving a worthy man.

Whatever Allan Kane may have thought, it was evident that Mary had cast a spell over him. He was frankly disappointed when their evening came to an end. He hoped that her aunt would be better, that perhaps they would go for a motor ride with him some time to-morrow. Might he phone to her room in the morning?

Mary knew that she ought to say no; but she knew very well that she wouldn't. She also thrilled at his evident pride as they crossed the lounge.

A knot of disappointed men watched them walk toward the lift. They frankly envied Kane. He purposely ignored them. Then lighting his pipe, he went out for a stroll on the boardwalk alone.

Old Lady Five-and-Ten was bright and cheerful in the morning. She seemed to be highly elated at what Mary told her.

"Go with him, of course. You'll enjoy it," she said of the motor ride.

"But he wants you, too!"

"I imagine so!" Mrs. Brayton chuckled. "Why not ask him to breakfast with us? I'll suggest that you go alone—that I feel I should keep quiet."

"Surely you see that it won't do!" Mary shook her head. "I'm not what he thinks I am. He'd hate me if he knew. In a way, I wish I'd told him."

"Fiddlesticks!" Mrs. Brayton exclaimed. "For the rest of the week you and I are just what we pretend. After that—well, perhaps—we'll be some one else."

That settled it, and Mary and Kane lunched at a wayside inn. Their afternoon

was marvelous, and Mrs. Brayton invited Kane to dine with them that evening.

"Of course you don't mind," she whispered furtively to Mary. "I'm forgetting it's your money that's footing all the bills."

Mary didn't, and Kane proposed that they take in a theater. Mrs. Brayton thought that would be lovely; but she was much too tired.

"No, indeed, my dear!" she objected, when Mary would have said no. "I won't hear of your staying with me."

In the morning the three were on the porch, comfortably settled in basket chairs, looking at the sea. Old Lady Five-and-Ten appeared to be in a thoughtful mood. Mary and Kane were chatting about those foolishly unimportant things that young people usually discuss in the presence of some one else. Suddenly Mrs. Brayton leaned forward in her chair.

"Young man," she interrupted Kane, "did you say you were a lawyer?"

"Why, yes," admitted Kane, as though accused of one of the cardinal sins.

"Then suppose we go into the writing room. I want to make a will." Mary gaped at her in amazement. "I've changed my mind, and I'm going to leave all that I have to Mary."

Was the old lady mad, or was it her aim to try to impress the man? Embarrassed and furious, Mary tried to postpone her determination.

This would make her more ridiculous when Kane should learn the truth. Something told her that he would—perhaps that very evening. If he said what she thought he was going to say, she would have to tell him.

Her protests were unavailing. The will was drawn, signed and sealed, and put in the hotel safe. Upstairs in their room, Mary reproached Old Lady Five-and-Ten.

"Now you've made it ten times worse!" She sobbed her disappointment. "He'll imagine I'm an heiress."

"Well, aren't you?" Mrs. Brayton asked. "Didn't you inherit a thousand dollars in cash? When I die you'll have everything that belongs to me. But you'll find he isn't interested in you on that account."

Mary stared at her horrified. It dawned on her that Mrs. Brayton was completely out of her mind. It was obvious that she now believed their make-believe was real.

Mary did not know what to do. She wished that Dr. Drake was there—that they had never come. Her reaction, however, was not one of fear, but rather one of pity for Old Lady Five-and-Ten. Had she, in her well meaning way, only accomplished harm?

But in spite of her anxiety, Mary was in a fever of nervous anticipation as she dressed for dinner. If her intuition was correct, and Kane should ask her to marry him, there would be nothing else to do but confess her sham.

He knew she was leaving to-morrow. That was why she reasoned that he would speak to-night. If only Old Lady Five-and-Ten had not drawn that senseless will!

Kane would suppose it a gesture, intended to impress him—a deliberate effort to make him believe she was something she was not. She wondered if he would hate her.

That she loved him, Mary knew, down in the depths of her heart. But in no event would she say yes without revealing her colors.

Sighing, she looked at the mirror. It showed nothing to sigh about. In her blue and silver frock and tiny silver slippers, Mary looked like a blue-eyed sprite in the sparkle of a fountain. The Spanish comb from the leather trunk was in her wavy hair. From the lobes of her ears hung pendants from the five and ten. At least, she thought, she looked the part that she was beginning to loathe.

"I've a headache," Mrs. Brayton said. "Make my excuses, my dear." Mary thought that she looked worn; that her eyes were abnormally bright. It seemed to her that they sparkled with a light of mischievous glee.

She felt just a little anxious over leaving her alone. In her mental state she could not be sure what embarrassing absurdity the old lady might think up. On several scores she was just as glad that Mrs. Brayton would not be with them this evening.

10 A

Allan Kane seemed to share her view, but from a different standpoint. After dinner they strolled to the pier, out beyond the dancing floor and the concert hall, to its very end. There, on a bench in a sheltered nook, they sat for some time in silence.

It was one of understanding, more eloquent than words. Or, at least it would have been but for Mary's conscience.

Kane's arm slipped about her. She buried her head on his shoulder. She knew what he was going to say—and she wanted him to say it—but she knew he mustn't.

"You darling!" he murmured, and held her close. "If I only dared to ask you, I'd be the happiest man in the world!"

"You mean that you're married!" She drew away.

"Certainly not!" he denied. "But I can't ask you to marry me. I'm poorer than a church mouse. I'm a lawyer, but I'm a clerk in Stephen Ruthven's office. The people I've talked to your aunt about are his clients, not my friends. I've no right to even think of a girl of your wealth and position!" His tone was dejected; bitter.

With a musical laugh Mary wound her arms about his neck. Then she softly whispered her confession in his ear.

"So you see I'm not an heiress. That's what made me miserable when I thought that you were rich."

"I am! You're you—and you're mine!" he breathed. "Some day our dream life may come true. In the meantime, we have each other!"

It was late when they reached the Diplomat, and reluctantly said good night. Mary wondered if Old Lady Five-and-Ten by chance might be awake. She was impatient to tell her this perfectly glorious news.

She and Allan had planned it all. No more silly pretense! No ephemeral castles in the air! Instead, a cozy bungalow—with a room for Mrs. Brayton. It seemed too good to be true.

On tiptoe she stepped into the room. There was not even a sound. Switching on the bedside light, she looked at the old lady's face.

Her eyes were closed, and there was a smile on her wrinkled features. Somehow she looked years younger—at rest and at peace with the world.

Mary drew back with a startled cry. Oh, it could not be—but she knew it was. Old Lady Five-and-Ten had gone to join the aristocratic friends who had left her long ago. Apparently she had passed away in the midst of pleasant dreams.

Mary's eyes were wet with tears as she went to the telephone. She was sobbing out her grief when Allan Kane came into the room with the house physician.

On the bureau was an envelope addressed in the feeble copperplate hand of Old Lady Five-and-Ten. Slipping his arm about Mary, Kane led her gently from the bed and into the suite's little parlor. He ripped the letter open and handed it to Mary. Together they read the message Mrs. Brayton had left for them:

Something tells me I'm going away—that I shan't see you again. There can scarcely be happiness greater than you have given me. That is why I made my will, and worded it as I did. All that I have I leave to you—you and Allan Kane.

I have no money and no property. No doubt you'll have plenty of both—although I suspected right away that Allan was as big a fraud as you and I, my dear. I used to know Stephen Ruthven, and Allan's chatter about his friends told me in an instant that he was masquerading.

After all, it has been worth while. Grown-ups relish "let's pretend" as much as little folks. Now and then a taste of it is mighty good for them. Treasure my legacy, my dears. I'm bequeathing you three precious things—happiness, love, and each other.

Mary folded the letter tenderly and thrust it into her dress. Then she slipped into Allan's arms and he held her to him close.

"How do you suppose—she knew that it would be—to-night?"

"Often old folks who are ill have such premonitions."

"It's a wonderful inheritance—a wonderful inheritance!" Mary sighed as he caressed her.

Kane looked down at her proudly. "You deserve it, you dear, unselfish thing!" He thought of all she had done. "That makes it all the more up to me to be worthy of my own!"

THE END



SCENTS

FAR out in the woods, the sun, and air,
Where the great wide silence dwells,
Lately, I know a brand new thing:
The buoyant memory of smells!

There's one of pine-needles, sun-steeped and keen,
Of water musk and sappy young leaves,
Of parched-dry lichen on bleached old rocks,
Of resinous spruce bark midst green hillocks,
Of warm pool water, where a soft wind weaves
A pungent perfume sweet and clean,
And that fine aroma of wood smoke curling
Up from our chimney—my thoughts go whirling
Round water, woods, the sun and air,
And the memory of smells is everywhere!

Peter A. Lea.



The Off Chance

By GORDON STILES

TO be familiar with Hinsdale, Long Island, is to be very much aware of the huge country estate of Otis J. Pyle who is known to business fame as "The Spark Plug King." And the cooped-up city dweller, gazing upon the seven hundred odd acres incorporated in the Pyle tract, to say nothing of the Georgian style mansion, invariably gives vent to an envious sigh. What with tennis courts, golf links, winding drives and vast reaches of well kept lawn—it is not to be greatly wondered at.

It is a beautiful spot all right, and never appeared to better advantage than on the July afternoon that marks the beginning of this story. Perhaps that was why the airplane, droning in from the direction of Brooklyn, seemed to hesitate as if loath to relinquish so brave a view.

Mrs. Pyle, with her two guests, Mrs. Sewickly Browne and Tarda Rehne—the latter a motion picture star—was sitting on the east lawn at the time and while the passing of aircraft was common enough, the

three idly watched the machine for want of anything better to do.

And as they watched, the great bird fluttered, spun around, then descended crazily to the ground. Even as the women sprang to their feet, chattering excitedly, the plane disappeared behind the trees that border the fourteenth and fifteenth holes of the golf course.

"Good Lord! He's crashed!" Mrs. Pyle exclaimed.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" cried Mrs. Sewickly Browne.

Tarda Rehne clutched at her breast and moaned: "Oh—oh—oh!"

"Trent! Trent!" Mrs. Pyle called.

Trent was the butler, but he did not answer. Instead, other servants came a running; among them was Beasley, the gardener.

"There's a plane down on the golf course, over behind the trees," Mrs. Pyle explained pantingly. "Where's Trent?"

"Gone to the village, madam. He'll be back any minute."

"You come, then," she directed Beasley and started, with her two companions toward where the plane had disappeared. Beasley followed with the other servants hard upon his heels.

Ten minutes later, badly winded, the party trooped onto the fairway where the aerial visitor had come to rest. Its single occupant, a lanky, weather-beaten young man, sat huddled on the grass, nursing his right knee and casting rueful glances at the machine, which seemed quite intact, notwithstanding its fall.

To the eager questions—"Are you hurt, what happened, anybody with you?"—he replied: "My knee's used up some, but I guess she'll be all right in a minute. Bones not broken. Something fouled my rudder wires. Ain't had a chance to look yet to find out what it was."

They stood about him, properly concerned, but obviously relieved at not having a corpse to deal with. At least the incident had furnished a break in the monotony of the afternoon—a monotony that would not normally be broken until Otis J. Pyle should arrive with his inevitable guests and start swinging the cocktail shaker.

The aviator tried his leg, gingerly, stood upright. "Not so good," he said with a grimace, "not so good. But I guess I can travel."

He turned to the machine whose markings labeled it as the property of the Amalgamated Airways Company, and began to examine his rudder controls. For ten minutes he worked and finally announced: "I've got it. Now she's all right."

"Will you come to the house and have a drink—or something?" Mrs. Pyle invited. "Your nerves must be shaky after that experience."

"No, thank you," he told her. "I'm testing out this bus and they will look for me to be coming back. Much obliged, though. Hope I didn't muss up your place too much."

"Not at all."

The company withdrew as the airman made his preparations for flight, and looked on in admiration at the difficult feat of taking off alone. But presently the motor

roared, the plane sped across the smooth ground and swept into the air.

II.

THE group of servants was well in the van as the party returned to the house. Mrs. Pyle said: "Thank goodness he wasn't killed!"

"I'm almost disappointed," giggled Miss Rehne. And Mrs. Sewickly Browne declared: "So am I. All our tramp for nothing."

But if they regretted the lack of excitement on the links, they found a plenty at the house. They had fifty yards to go when Tessie, Mrs. Pyle's personal maid, came bursting from the door, white-faced and pop-eyed!

"Oh, Mrs. Pyle! We've been robbed! The house has been robbed!" It seemed as if Tessie was about to swoon.

Mrs. Pyle grasped the girl's shoulder, shook her none too gently.

"What do you mean—robbed?" she demanded. The other women squeaked incoherently and quickened their pace.

"Your room, madam! The safe! Please come!"

The other members of the staff were milling about in various stages of hysteria and Beasley was trying to quiet them when the lady of the house strode through the door.

She had herself well in hand now. Her jewels were insured and Otis J. Pyle brought home a hatful of money every night, anyway. Already the lady was getting a fine kick out of the business.

Miss Rehne, too, appeared to have attained her calm. Her gems also were insured. Of the three, Mrs. Sewickly Browne looked most worried. There was a new diamond bracelet in her jewel case which she had neglected as yet to protect with insurance against theft.

A very few minutes sufficed to reveal what had happened. The thief or thieves had made a clean sweep. Certain bits of jewelry that the three women had left lying carelessly on dressers or in drawers had been gathered in; Mrs. Sewickly Browne's jewel case which had been locked in her

dressing case had been secured by the slashing of the latter article of luggage!

The safe in the library had been opened by knocking off the dial and driving the spindle in so as to wreck the combination and permit the door to open. And therefrom everything of value belonging to Mrs. Pyle and Tarda Rehne had been removed.

Further, some three hundred dollars in cash had been abstracted from Mrs. Pyle's desk!

All in all, a very pretty job.

Mrs. Pyle swung upon the servants.

"Why didn't some of you stay here to watch the house?" she demanded. Whereupon they looked stupidly, half guiltily at each other.

Beasley said: "You told me to come, madam. And I guess we were all too excited to think about it. Then, I expected Trent would be here right away."

"Where is Trent now?"

Beasley shook his head. "I couldn't say, madam. He ought to be here now, sure."

"Telephone the police at once," Mrs. Pyle ordered.

While Beasley hastened to obey, the mistress idly tried the door of a vacant guest room close at hand. The door, ordinarily left unlocked, did not give. So Mrs. Pyle turned the key and looked casually within. Her eyes bulged at what she saw!

For, stretched limply on the floor, blood clotting over a wound above his right temple, lay Trent!

"Good Heaven!" Mrs. Pyle cried. "Trent—Trent! He's been murdered! Beasley, call the police, the doctor!"

Guests and servants crowded forward, but Beasley having hastily summoned the officers, appeared and held them back.

"Don't disturb anything!" he said. "Wait! Maybe he's not dead!"

The others fell aside and the gardener knelt beside the butler, felt for his heart. Then he said: "Get some water, some whisky—quick! He's alive!"

Trent stirred as the hot liquid trickled into his throat; five minutes later, he sat up weakly with his head against Beasley's knee. At that moment, Chief Perry of the Hinsdale police, entered the house accom-

panied by Captain Schmidt and Detective Sergeant Williams.

III.

OBVIOUSLY, the first step on the part of the police officers was to obtain Trent's story of what had occurred. And, after more liquid stimulant coupled with a quarter hour rest during which the others waited with what patience they could muster, the butler began:

"I 'ad been in the town, sir," he addressed Chief Perry, "to place orders for supplies, sir. On my return, I 'ad almost reached the 'ouse, sir, when I observed an airplane over the estate. It seemed to me to be in trouble, sir. And, sure enough, as I watched, it came wabblin' down.

"I saw that it would be somewhere on the links, sir, and so I 'urried as fast as I could. A motor car with several persons—men—in it went past me just then and when I arrived at the 'ouse, I found the car there before the door. There was a man on the porch and 'e says: 'Ah!' 'e says, 'you are Mrs. Pyle's butler, I take it.' I tells 'im as 'ow I am and 'e says: 'She wants you inside at once,' 'e says.

"So I 'urries in with 'im behind me. And no sooner am I inside the 'all, sir, than I gets a crack on the 'ead, sir. At least, I expect that was whát 'appened."

Trent put his hand gingerly to the spot where Beasley had applied a cold compress.

The chief asked: "Was that the last you remember until you came to, here, a short time ago?"

"That was all, sir. 'Ow I came in this room, I 'ave no idea, sir."

Perry looked at his brother officers; saw that the thing was as clear to them as to him. To Mrs. Pyle, he said: "It is quite simple, Mrs. Pyle. Your aviator pulled a fake crash merely to attract your attention while his pals watched for him to drop and rushed the house instantly. They probably have been keeping tab on the place for some time and picked an hour when there were no men about except Beasley and possibly Trent."

Mrs. Pyle murmured: "Of all things! Can you imagine?"

"The next step," continued Perry, "is to

locate the bird who was in the plane. The chances are that the machine doesn't belong to the Amalgamated Airways, at all—or if it does, it was stolen for the stunt. I'll have to get you and your friends to tell me all you can about this aviator's appearance; then we'll go after him."

Trent was helped to his chamber and the others put through a minute examination as to the characteristics of the suspected flyer. In an aside to Mrs. Pyle, Perry said: "No chance of this butler being mixed up in it, I suppose? His absence in town couldn't have had anything to do with it, could it? How long have you had him?"

"He has been with me only six months. But he came with the best possible references—direct from England. His last employer was Lord Perriton with whom he had served for eight years. The reason for leaving his post was that Lord and Lady Perriton were departing for a three-year trip around the world and were closing up their town house in London. Before that, Trent had worked for Sir Gilbert Dufflesford and Celia, Lady Embrie. Trent has the original letters from all of them. I trust him implicitly."

"I just asked as a matter of course. 'Tain't likely they would have batted him a smash like that, anyway, unless, of course, they were out to double cross him. And that wouldn't pay because he'd be sure to spill the works if he wasn't killed outright. Well, we'll go after this stunt flyer and the chances are we'll have the whole gang locked up within twenty-four hours."

With which Chief Perry and Detective Williams took their departure, leaving Captain Schmidt on guard at the Pyle home.

To Mrs. Pyle, this had the appearance of an unnecessary precaution, seeing that the damage was done and there was little likelihood of the thieves returning to put their heads into the lion's mouth, as it were. But Schmidt knew what he was about as was proved when Otis J. Pyle arrived with friends and, after a conference, passed over certain coin of the realm, in appreciation of the great efforts which Chief Perry and associates were about to put forth toward the apprehension of the culprits and the recovery of the gems.

Further, at the suggestion of the officer, Mr. Pyle authorized the posting of a reward of twenty thousand dollars for information leading to the arrest and conviction et cetera, et cetera—The value of the property was in excess of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars; doubtless the insurance companies would also put up a substantial sum.

IV.

THAT was as far as the proceedings had gone when the news of the theft came to the notice of Jack Tempest, partner in the Climax Investigation Bureau, a private agency in Manhattan and, in a twinkling, Mr. Tempest was on the job.

Jack was a young man who had at one time been on the police force of Shelburne Water, a fashionable resort on the other side of Long Island, and therefore, was familiar with the layout of the famous strip of earth that begins with Brooklyn and ends at Montauk Point.

In his work there, Jack had come into frequent contact with headquarters in New York and had made a host of friends among Manhattan sleuths. Which stood him in good stead when he formed a connection with the Climax Bureau in that he had ready access to the files of the identification department and the benefit of the advice of veterans.

Many of these were willing to concede that Jack did not require any advice, especially after his latest triumph in the apprehension of Dan Burky, who had got away with more than one hundred thousand dollars' worth of jewelry of wealthy summer residents of Shelburne Water. For that success, Jack had received almost twelve thousand dollars in rewards.

Jack's long suit was his knowledge of personal traits of known criminals. To this subject he had given long and careful study and his private files contained information that would have startled exceedingly those to whom it referred.

Jack did not bother with the ordinary identification marks such as scars, gold teeth, crooked fingers and moles. That stuff was on file at headquarters and he could consult it when he chose.

He specialized in such items as the sort of music a criminal preferred, his manner of speaking, the brand of cigarettes or cigars he smoked, the color he fancied in a cravat, his taste in gloves—oh, a lot of things that might appear silly to his competitors.

Still—well, take the Burky case, Jack had trapped his man simply because he knew that Dan's favorite cigar was the Devil's Delight.

But, to get on with the story, Jack went into action the minute he learned of the Pyle robbery and the big reward the spark plug king had offered. So that along about ten o'clock of the same evening, the young man presented himself at the Long Island house and was referred to Captain Schmidt.

The captain was not inclined to be over cordial, but he knew all about Jack Tempest's reputation, and hesitated to treat the other curtly. So he mustered a smile and said: "I've heard of you, Mr. Tempest. Always admired your work in that Shelburne Water case. I suppose now you will walk in and grab off the cream in this job."

"Thanks for your good opinion, captain," Jack replied with the touch of deference that made him popular with regular police officials everywhere. "It goes without saying that I'd like to skim the cream, but I dare say your people have got the case all sewed up by this time. Still, I suppose I shall be free to ramble about and look things over."

"That's up to Mr. Pyle, of course. He will not object, I guess. Here he comes now."

The spark plug king expressed pleasure at meeting Mr. Tempest. Certainly. He would be given every facility in his investigation of the robbery, and good luck!

Whereupon Jack quickly skimmed over the ground already covered by Chief Perry and his aids. He found Trent in good humor, and whistling: "The Long, Long Trail." Which caused Jack to remark amusedly: "That's what I'm on, Mr. Trent. I hope you won't mind helping me all you can."

"I 'ope it proves to be a short, short trail, sir," Trent said. "And at the finish I 'ope to be allowed a bash—just one single bash—at the beggar 'oo crowned me, sir."

Jack laughed. "Perhaps that could be arranged."

Trent proved an eager helper. The car in which the robbers had come, he explained, was a new Diana coach, gray in color, with a silver bathing girl on the radiator cap. His assailant was a man about five feet eight inches in height, stocky, wearing a short black mustache. His clothes were brown, he wore tan shoes and a gray soft hat.

That was as much as Trent had been able to see in the few seconds available. He had not seen the man's companions except for the fleeting glimpse as they sped past in the car. He believed that one of them wore a light-colored motoring cap.

Tempest jotted down this information, questioned Mrs. Pyle and her guests about the flying man, and took himself off to the headquarters of the Amalgamated Airways, near Hempstead.

There, to his surprise, he found Chief Perry, Detective Williams, together with several local officers, seated in the company office and glaring at a harassed looking individual in flying regalia who stared sullenly back at his tormentors.

Jack joined the group of policemen, and in three minutes had the substance of what had been going on.

The flyer, who gave his name as George Anson, and whose license was in that name, admitted that he was the man who had been forced down on the Pyle golf course that afternoon. His rudder wires had fouled during the flight, he contended, but he had adjusted them and flown back to his own field.

That was all he had to say, and he stood pat on it. He denied having anything to do with the crooks who had robbed the Pyle home, and he defied the officers to pin anything on him.

After the bullying had continued for another fifteen minutes, it looked to Jack very much like a stalemate. He glanced at Anson, who sat stolidly, drawing little pictures on a pad before him and refusing to look up any more. His set jaw convinced Jack that nothing was to be gained by remaining.

Jack yawned and started to rise from his

chair. Then something caught his eye and he looked more closely at Anson. Finally he walked to where the latter sat, leaned over and asked, abruptly: "Ever done time, Anson?"

"I have not," replied the other, his voice angry.

"Sorry. No harm to ask," Jack smiled and Anson looked mollified. The New Yorker tarried no longer, but took himself off. Once outside, he hastened to the station and an hour later was in his office.

V.

RETURNING to Hempstead the following morning, Jack found matters still at a deadlock. The police had not felt they had sufficient evidence on which to hold Anson, but Jack was sure that the young man was under surveillance.

In fact he thought he had the shadow spotted in the person of an absorbed carpenter who was making minor repairs on one of the hangars.

Which interested Jack not at all. His business was with Anson. The latter scowled at him and demanded: "Now what?"

Jack came to the point at once.

"When you told me that you had never done time, Anson, you spoke the truth," he said. "But that does not mean that you never had been arrested."

Anson started at that. "What are you tryin' to do, kid me?"

"You can judge of that when I tell you that you were pinched in Newark on March 5, 1920, charged with first degree robbery—the stick-up of a paymaster. The stick-up was a flop, but you were pinched two days afterward."

"I wasn't held," Anson returned, sullenly, but with a trace of underlying alarm.

"I know it. But you see, I happened to be in the office of the D. A. over there when they were quizzing you. You had given the name of Howard Smith, and I have a hunch that is your right name. Come on, now."

"If you recognized me last night why didn't you spill it?"

"I didn't recognize you at first, but the way you were drawing pictures on that pad recalled something to my mind. So I went home and dug into my files, found a little note I had made in my Jersey dope. I copied it off for you. See." He laid a slip before Anson:

NEW JERSEY

Newark.

Smith, Howard. March 5, 1920. First degree robbery.

Nervous trait—Drawing churches with fence around them on paper while being questioned.

Anson stared at the paper. "I'll be damned!" he said.

"You see, when I piped you scribbling last night I sneaked a look and noticed that you were drawing more churches. That recalled Jersey, but I had to dig up my notes for name and date. Now will you come clean?"

Anson wilted on the spot. "I'll come clean," he said huskily. "But you won't believe it."

"Go on," Jack told him.

"Well, then, Howard Smith is my real name. I was in that stick up. I'd done a couple of jobs before and got away with 'em. But that pinch threw a scare into me and I decided to cut the rough stuff and go straight. But I knew that the cops would be hot after me even if they didn't have the goods on me then.

"So I moved over to Manhattan, helped myself to a new moniker and studied engineering at Cooper Union, nights. Got a job driving a truck and later on learned to fly. I got married two years ago, and I've got a nice little baby girl, eight months old. I landed a good job here as experimental flyer and things have been goin' fine.

"Now this comes up. I'll tell you, I don't know a damn thing about that Pyle business—not a single damn thing! But now that you are on to that Jersey stuff, you'll ride me ragged. I know!"

After a minute's silence, Jack said, quietly: "You'd better come through, Anson."

"I got nothin' to come through with. That's flat!"

Jack rose at once. "Very well. No use

in me hanging around, then." And before the other realized it, Tempest was gone.

VI.

JACK devoted himself to the Pyle household once more. Prodded Trent's memory fiercely in regard to the man who had struck him down.

The picture which the butler's repeated descriptions imprinted on Jack's mind took definite form until at last he had it! He knew exactly the man Trent had been portraying for him.

"Beano" Kelly! That was the bird!

He asked Trent: "Did he throw up his jaw at you when he spoke?"

"By the Lord!" exclaimed the butler. "He did. I wouldn't 'ave thought of that if you 'adn't mentioned it, sir. But 'e did!"

"Good enough, Trent," Jack said, and hastened to New York.

He was jubilant. Beano would not be hard to round up. Once he laid hands on him, the trick would be pretty well turned. The juicy rewards seemed already within his grasp. Fine business.

As it turned out, rounding up Beano proved no trick at all. A visit to headquarters in Manhattan easily established his whereabouts. For, as Jack presently became aware, Arthur—Beano—Kelly was at the moment engaged in serving a six-year sentence in the State Prison at Trenton, New Jersey.

Jack stared at the evidence before his eyes. There it was. Two months ago, Kelly had been arrested for a robbery similar to the one at Pyle's and had taken a plea of guilty. Already he had served six weeks of his term.

Jack went to his office and locked himself in his private room. He lighted his pipe, sat down at his desk, and gave himself over to deep thought.

He delved into all angles of the problem, weighing this and that, racking his mind for another crook who would fit Trent's description.

"By George!" he exclaimed to himself. "I wonder—I wonder—if some bird didn't get himself up to resemble Kelly, and

adopt some of his characteristics purposefully!" That was worth considering.

After two hours, Jack rose, shook himself. The set of his lips indicated that he had formed a plan of action.

His first move was to make his way to the Western Union office, where he filed a number of messages. Returning to the office, he called in one of his best operatives to whom he gave certain instructions. Then he told his partner: "I'm off now. If anybody inquires for me, say that I am in Chicago, but that you don't know my address. May be gone a week—or a month. I can't be sure."

The other nodded. Jack had done this thing before. And always he had brought home the bacon.

Jack went to his apartment in West Sixty-Seventh Street, but he did not leave town that day. Instead he tarried until replies to his various messages had been delivered to him at home, as he had directed. The first two gave him unlimited satisfaction and he chuckled as he read them. Finally the one for which he waited with the most impatience arrived and Jack whooped with joy.

VII.

FIVE days later, at two o'clock in the morning, Jack Tempest lay under the drooping branches of a bridal wreath bush at the edge of the Pyle side lawn. He had lain there now for four nights—ten o'clock to dawn. He was growing weary of what appeared to be a useless vigil.

That is why he started so violently when, of a sudden, he perceived a shadowy figure moving with absolute quietness, in the vicinity of the tennis courts at the rear of the great house.

"Aha!" Jack breathed. "At last!"

He wormed noiselessly across the springy lawn, the better to observe the activities of the other person. The latter made his way to a pile of clay which had been deposited hard by the tennis courts and evidently was designed for surface material.

Pausing, as if to listen, the man stooped and began to burrow in the clay pile. Jack watched tensely.

Presently the digger bent lower, then

straightened up, and Jack saw in his hands an object that showed dimly white against the velvet of the night. He stiffened for action.

His quarry appeared to be restoring the appearance of the clay with one foot and when this had been accomplished to his satisfaction, he turned and made his way swiftly toward the highway leading to Hinsdale. His course took him directly past the spot where Jack lay.

The detective did not wait, but sprang to his feet and, with drawn gun, rushed the other.

The man hesitated a second, turned as if to flee—then, with a muttered curse, whipped out a pistol and fired point-blank at Tempest.

The wind of two shots fanned Jack's cheek as his own weapon spoke. His opponent crumpled on the grass as lights sprang up in the Pyle mansion and the master's voice bawled out: "What's the row about?"

An hour later, when the victim had been lodged in hospital, where he made a statement to Jack and the local police before submitting to an operation for the removal of a bullet from his right lung, Tempest told his story to a very wide-awake group in the Pyle drawing-room.

"You see, I believed young Anson," he was saying. "And so I scratched him off my list of suspects. Then, when I came a cropper on the Kelly business, I began to think. And I had a sudden hunch that Trent was the man.

"I cabled to London and learned that there were no such persons as Lord Periton and Sir Gilbert Dufflesford. That showed I was on the right track. But my

best bet was an off chance which I took and which turned out to be the berries."

"What was that?" asked Pyle, leaning forward.

"I figured that a bird who could put it over with forged credentials and all, as Trent did, would be an old hand. So I wired Scotland Yard and asked if anybody there could recall a crook who probably worked the butler game and who was given to whistling, 'The Long, Long Trail.'

"And I'm hanged if the answer didn't come back that half a dozen of them knew the duck! His name was Joe Turk and he had done four stretches for butler stuff. He was supposed to be in Canada. You see, Trent was always whistling that tune and everything checked up fine. All I had to do then was watch him.

"According to his story, he got home just as you rushed off to see that airplane. He had been laying for a chance to turn something and here it opened up for him—on a silver platter, so to speak. He grabbed the stuff and stuck it in the clay pile, locked the door of the room you found him in. Then he pulled a little second-story work along the ledge under the windows and got into the room that way.

"With the fire tongs, he gave himself a clip—enough to make it bleed and look nasty. But he was not unconscious any of the time. He made up the description of his attacker from a picture he had seen of Beano Kelly in the paper. Thought that would answer for a bum steer. And that's about all there is to it."

They sat silent for a moment—Jack felt their unspoken tribute. Then Pyle crossed to the phonograph, fumbled a moment, and presently the strains of "The Long, Long Trail" floated out upon the morning air.

THE END



MORE FOR YOUR MONEY

than anywhere else is what you get in ARGOSY-ALLSTORY. Not only that, but in quality as well as quantity this magazine still stands unsurpassed in the field of fiction, in which it was the pioneer.



As Told by the Ramblin' Kid

By EARL WAYLAND BOWMAN

THIS ain't no story of a thoroughbred, a-prancin' 'round in a tanbark ring, with ribbons decoratin' his shapely head, while 'lectric lights glimmer on everything. No, indeedy, this ain't no story of a Horse Show Hero, or Kentucky King of a turf-fringed track. It's just about a little old bronc I used to know, a little old bronc called Captain Jack.

When I think of that little old horse my eyes get dim. Let's see. It's mighty nigh thirty years since I rode him the first time he ever was rode. How old was he? Well, nobody knowed, but he'd been bossin' his string of wild brood mares a full half dozen years and dodgin' the snares the punchers had been layin' to get his head in ropin' throw.

And it seemed like the game little devil would always know when a human animal, his natural enemy, was anyways near; and he'd lead his bunch in the get-away.

He was such a general, and worked so slick to keep his herd of outlaws free from every trick to box-cañon them or ride them down by swift relays, that the boys all knowed him, and 'count of his wise old ways, 'fore he'd ever felt a man on his back, they'd up and christened him Captain Jack.

Bert Lily, Charley Saunders and me got him to goin' one day, up on the East Mesa, without ever knowin' at the time that some of Old Man Lily's mares was with Captain Jack. And one of them fillies was a handsome black that was raised on the ranch—gentle, a kind of pet. If she hadn't been there, I guess he'd have been a wild horse yet.

All of our mounts were good and fresh, nifty and keen, and the minute Bert and Charley and me all seen the tame young mare with the outlaw's bunch we just had a sort of three-cornered hunch that if once we could get them over the mesa's rim

into the cañon, the filly—she was full of vim—might head for the ranch, and we could cut them into the wing corral. We got them down all right, and sure enough the scheme worked swell. The mare, runnin' a streak, swung up the cañon toward the ranch. Old Jack wavered, for just a breath, where the trails both branch, then like a flash he was fannin' the wind after the coal-black mare—straight into the corral! So that's the way we got old Jack there; and that just shows he wasn't much different from a lot of men, for he followed a female critter into a darned tight pen.

Captain Jack wasn't no great shakes for beauty nor stylish grace—just a strawberry roan with two stockin' feet and a blaze-streaked face; a dead black tail and a mane to match, and lots of devil in his flashin' eye; and he wasn't so overly big, 'bout fourteen and maybe a half hands high. But he was every inch horse, from his ear clean to the ground; and his wind and limb were smooth, and his nerve was strong and sound. You betcher life! There was nothin' but genuine horse wrapped up inside his glistenin' hide! And as he battled 'round the wing-corral, Bert 'lowed: "He'd shore be lightnin' to hackamore, saddle and ride!"

Well, Charley he figured that he didn't want him—nor neither did Bert. Said he was too blamed ornery and mean to be worth more'n a worn-out quirt. But somehow I felt sorry for the brave little cuss, smashin' 'round inside the corral and makin' such a fuss to get outside and be free to run on the big, broad range. And I reckon that was nothin' so queer nor powerful strange, for I myself was a homeless runt and called by the bunch "The Ramblin' Kid"; so, feelin' that way, I announced if they didn't want him, I sure did.

Just then Old Man Lily come ridin' up, and he was tickled to death 'cause we had got the renegade stallion corraled at last—the cowmen wanted the outlaws shot. The wicked old brute whipped out his gun and started to pull a drop on old Jack's head. That made me crazy, and I yelled, as I drewed on him: "Bullet that horse, and I'll kill you dead!"

Well, me workin' at the time for the

brash old man, of course that trick meant I'd lose my job and have to fan. But I didn't care, nor give two whoops, for the range was wide and the world was big. Anyhow, I wasn't the kind of kid to back-trail, or ever renege; besides, I was plumb red mad, from sombrero top to spur, from outside hide to inside core, for I never could see a horse-brute 'bused by no damn man without gettin' devilish sore.

Then a batty and fool thing happened; something naturally you'd hardly believe. I just slid offen my mount, stripped the saddle and hackamore gear, and with one big heave throwed the whole outfit, blanket, bridle and all, over the bars and into the wing corral. Then climbed up and dropped down inside, on foot, with just my rope and faced that bronc that was wild as hell!

For maybe a second Captain Jack stopped, surprised. The boys outside just held their breath, thinkin' I'd sure gone clean loco and was flirtin' with certain and pronto death. Then here he come—his mouth wide open, ears laid back, eyes hated, strikin' feet and lowered head. I side-stepped. The rope went true. A quick run to the snubbin' post—a single half hitch—I'd throwed him dead!

Like a flash he hit his feet, whirled, gave a maddened squeal and come straight back. I run with the rope, side-windin' once more, yankin' like hell to get the slack. That time when he went down— Well, what's the difference? I won—was safe on deck when they let us outside, and, 'fore we stopped at the Hundred and One, Captain Jack and me had made a ninety-mile ride. Then I knowed I'd found at last the one true and game little horse. And Jack knowed that the kid he carried was his friend as well as his boss!

II.

CAPTAIN JACK and me worked the whole blame range from the Raton Hills to No Man's Land; we ramped around from the Purgatory clean down to the mean old Rio Grande, and them sure were life's most joyous and happy years. But now they're gone—the little old horse, the virgin plains,

the long-horn steers—gone, with the smell and moan of the herd, the night watch—calm, 'neath starry skies— Shucks! this fool smoke keeps tormentin' my dim old eyes!

Jack and me were punchin', straight, with the Circle Bar and the Lazy S, trailin' a bunch of restless Texans, 'bout six thousand head, I guess, from down on the Lower Pecos 'long the line to the Upper Cimmaron. The herd was down for the night. Dave and me were on the graveyard watch, alone.

When Parker, the night boss, shook me out to take my turn, I hadn't intended to ride old Jack—aimin' to rest him and take a sorrel that was in my string. But Jack whinnied, and I turned back and took him—'cause somehow, well, I was lonesome, I reckon; and anyway I had a kind of hunch to take him, for there was an uneasy feel to the air, and a tenseness out there among the bunch of wild Texas brutes, that made me want to be sure of the horse I rode.

And do you know that some way I've always felt that Jack himself knowed I was goin' to need just him that night, more than ever before in all the years we'd been ramblin' 'round together— It's that damned smoke botherin', them ain't tears! And I believe, too, the game old boy had a notion we were startin' to make our last hard ride. So I took him—and old Jack did his best! To save my life that little old bronc gave his, and—died!

We had swung around the herd just once. They were bedded down in a sort of horse-shoe shape; had passed Dave and was back in the bend of the band. A thundercap hung a shadow, like crape, over the rest of Eagle Tail Peak; out to the east there was a sickly glare from the risin' moon. There was a kind of dead, sullen hush to the midnight air—a sort of silent threat. Then from the west there came a rumble and one bright streamin' flash! Like a cloud of death them Texans were up—and gone! Straight to the south in their insane dash.

And Jack and me were caught! Caught fast! No chance but to run! To run—run like a hound from hell— To run with the fear-crazed brutes—in that sea of horns—and God help us both if old Jack fell!

A pair of shots from my forty-four showed Dave I was pinched—tight—in the heart of the wild stampede. He didn't dare to try millin' the herd with me in there; all he could do was follow at his bronc's best speed.

I just leaned over on old Jack's neck and talked to him, soft and low: "Game old horse! Good old pal! They can't get us— Run, old sport! Now— Get down and go!"

They were crowdin' us; crowdin' us hard; the roar of the trampin' feet was like the thunder of a storm-mad sea. The lightnin' was blazin', over there to the west; the press was fierce; but Jack was runnin' strong and free—

Then a big wild brute, just ahead, stumbled; hit a badger hole. Old Jack tried to clear the horns; the imp of hell throwed up his head! One keen point drove deep into old Jack's breast—they were sharp as thorns! The tough little devil just barely flinched from the deadly crash; and I leaned lower, slipped my hand under his neck, and felt the gash— Then I knowed my pal was done to death, for the blood was spurtin' in a steady stream; but the game old sport never checked a bit—just lunged right on with still more steam!

Well, when I felt that ragged wound and old Jack's blood gushin' out, so fast and hot, I just went locoed crazy and wished every long-horn steer in the world was shot! Then, started pumpin' my forty-four. Every time that old gun popped, one of them snortin', murderin', long-horn steers just crumpled up and dropped!

I knowed they were bound to get old Jack and me, but 'fore they did, I just wanted to see how many of the devils I could kill. And I shot quick, and straight, and with a wicked will! So, I emptied my gun and emptied my belt—when she snapped on the last empty shell, eighteen Lazy S steers had felt my bullets— I'd counted the brutes as each one fell!

Then I throwed my gun and just lopped down on Old Jack's neck and put my hand over that terrible hole; foolishly thinkin' I'd hold in the streamin' blood that was

drenchin' with agony my boyish soul! And so we rode! All around, the fear-mad steers struggled in a race that was run with Death; and my heart was torn with a stabbin' pain as I could hear the whistle of Old Jack's breath.

Straight away, over the plain, toward the south where waited Arroya Grande—deep and wide and dark. Around us the roar of the rushin' herd; the moon, up now, ghostly gray; and once in awhile a spark from Dave's gun as he followed, doin' his and his bronco's level best to cheer me up, with the flash of his iron, in that killin', supreme test.

Fightin' for breath, old Jack plunged on; me low on his neck, blind with rage and grief and sobbin': "It's all right, old man! You're holdin' 'em down—damn 'em—damn 'em! (I could feel his body throbbin'!) Game old Jack— Good old pard! If they—get—you—I'm with you—pal!"

And old Jack must have heard; just must have heard and understood, even in all that rumble, every tremblin' word; for though he was weakenin' from loss of blood and terrible shudders shook his frame, and his wind was comin' in sickenin' gasps, he'd pick right up when I'd whisper

his name! On and on, without a check—God! What a race for life for a kid and a little old horse to run!

Then old Jack stopped! For barely a second! I felt him crouch—he stiffened—I thought we both were done! My God—what a leap! Out and out— It seemed like we would never stop! The earth just faded away—just faded away in a straight down drop. We were free! We were free of the wild stampede— Old Jack had jumped the Arroya Grande! He had jumped that gap in the earth a twenty-foot bridge would barely have spanned!

He went to his knees; staggered a reelin' step or two; tried to go on—stopped—and fell. That was the end of our last hard ride; I wasn't hurt; there ain't much more I care to tell. The roar grew less and less; the herd swerved east, up Arroya Grande, finally drifted away. The boys found us there—me layin' with my head on old Jack's neck—sobbin'—just at the break of day. We buried him—deep—no damned wolf should gnaw his bones! And I, well, I quit the range; but my heart's still there—where I left little old Captain Jack, that wasn't no horse show hero, but was game to the end and square!

THE END



FRATERNITY

GOSH! It's great to have some feller
Bump into you as you go
Down the street and land a wallop
On your back and say—"Hello!"
Makes you feel that you're somebody,
And you've always got a show
While there's fellers that will slap you
On the back and say—"Hello!"

And it's good to be a feller
That knows other fellers, too,
And can greet 'em when he meets 'em,
Like a man that's in "Who's Who";
Makes a man feel fine and dandy
To call others "Bill" or "Joe,"
And to waltz right up and whale 'em
On the back and say—"Hello!"

Will Thomas Withrow.

THE READER'S VIEWPOINT

FROM far-off Australia comes the first roast of The Reader's Viewpoint. It's a "brainless cripple," says our correspondent, and hopes soon to see notice of its discontinuance. In the same mail was a communication from Methuen, Massachusetts, suggesting that we enlarge the department to three pages. So there you are. Two weeks ago we had something to say about the status of this section of our magazine. Certain it is if we decided to omit it we should not care to do so until after ascertaining the results of a guessing contest we are planning to inaugurate in connection with the finish of "The Return of George Washington," George Worts's astounding serial to begin October 15. We expect to get a lot of fun out of that which should atone for the extra bother a department like this entails upon us. And we feel we owe it to our readers to give them a harder nut to crack than the outcome of "Why Did She Do It?" proved to be for them. Further particulars later.

Unless Robert D. S. and Paul L. S. can tell us who wrote "Out of the Moon" we cannot answer their query. They should both be delighted with "The Return of George Washington" and other decidedly "different" serials that are to follow it. This will be good news, too, to G. H. L. Also to W. T. B., of Barbados. M. B. is informed that we still have back numbers of "The Seal of Satan" in stock. The story began in the issue for February 6, 1926, and ended in that for March 6. Any of the five numbers will be sent for twenty cents each. To the correspondent who wrote "Please put this in the Reader's Viewpoint, because I wrote before and it was not printed," we should like to suggest that he make another attempt, with comments on the stories he has liked or disliked, put as briefly as possible. As we have many times pointed out, it is utterly out of the question to publish all the letters we receive or even half or a quarter of them.

A letter signed "A. H. B. and others" implies that Fred MacIsaac and Kenneth Perkins are under contract to this magazine which leaves the editor no choice but to publish everything they write. This is distinctly not the case. In fact, no author is under contract to us. Each manuscript that is offered is judged strictly on its merits.

SHEPHERD, MICH.

Give us more railroad stories. "Pounding the Rails" was very good. When I go to the newsstand the first thing I do is pick up an *ARGOSY* and glance down the list of authors. If I see that Don Waters is listed I know that there is a good railroad story in store for me. It sells me the magazine. If your company publishes a magazine of all railroad stories, please send me a copy as a sample. If you do not publish one and know of any company which does, please tell me where I can get it, as I have tried to find a railway story magazine in every State in the U. S. A. and have been unsuccessful. B. W. F.

We do not know of any magazine now published devoted wholly to railroad fiction. From now on we expect frequently to print a story of this type from Don Waters or Laurance M. Hare, who have both had practical experience in the business.

RIVERSIDE, CALIF.

Allow me to compliment you on your excellent story, "The Call to Arms," by Gordon Stiles. I am a Canadian ex-service man, and have felt some resentment at times at the attitude of Ameri-

can writers regarding the war, but in this yarn, so true to those days, I felt very kindly toward Stiles and compliment him very highly on his ability as a writer and for putting those sterling chaps who came over from the States in the early part of the war in their proper light; lovable, loyal, fightin' fools.

Your magazine was good before you signed up Stiles, but it is much better now he is with us.

Yours for more of Stiles's style. E. L. D.

QUAY, OKLA.

This is the first time I have written—and I started reading the *All-Story* with the story, "At His Mercy," by Johnston McCulley, and the *ARGOSY* with "The Spy at Valley Forge," by A. P. Terhune, who has turned into a dog fancier—but I like his historical romances much better. I like the *ARGOSY* "as she is," but could appreciate more "different" stories, and less—if possible—Westerns. I inclose two dollars for six months' subscription to *ARGOSY*. W. P. J.

HAMILTON, ONTARIO, CANADA.

As a reader of your fine magazine, I would like to express my hearty appreciation of the story, "The Call to Arms," by Gordon Stiles; I have enjoyed it greatly. Mr. Stiles quite evi-

dently knows what he is talking about. This is not his only good story either. I like the whole magazine very much.

G. H.

HARTFORD, CONN.

I have been a reader of the ARGOSY when it was *Golden Argosy*, 'way back in the early eighties. Have read that others have read it ever since they were twelve years old. Well, they did not state how old they are now. I was twelve, I think; am now fifty-eight—honest, don't look it, do I?—and look forward to issue day just as eagerly as when I was a boy. The ARGOSY is O. K., Westerns, *et cetera*, including the kickers in Viewpoint. I see Connecticut is well represented in the issue of August 20; I thought all the kickers were from the West and South. "The War Chief" was fine. How about a sequel?

G. G. McC.

ALHAMBRA, CALIF.

I have been a reader of the ARGOSY for a year. Have enjoyed it a great deal. I liked "Why Did She Do It?" by Coralie Stanton and Heath Hosken. I also liked "Forgotten Trails," by Frederick C. Davis, and "Too Many Friends," by Jack Bechdolt. All of Richard F. Merrifield's stories are great! I would like to see more of them. Don't cut out Western stories!

Just a word for my father. He has read ARGOSY for many years and has enjoyed every bit of it.

E. V. N.

WEBSTER, FLA.

Inclosed you will find one dollar for which please send me the ARGOSY for three months. "Eyes West" is the best story you have printed since you gave us "Red Darkness," though it takes a good story to beat "Seven Footprints to Satan." I can't decide whether Kenneth Perkins, MacIsaac, Merritt, or Seltzer wrote "Eyes West." Please tell us. The ARGOSY can't be beat; there's only one thing wrong with it, it's hard to wait a week for the next copy. I like your Western stories best. Let 'er buck.

WILLMA H.

The second successful guess on the author of "Eyes West" has just come—September 6. It is from Milton Gellert, New York City, and makes two winners thus far out of one hundred and six tries.

BROOKLYN, N. Y.

The Reader's Viewpoint is a valuable addition to your great magazine. It is the first thing I turn to. The only author that so far has given the hero to the wrong girl is John Holden. In "Eyes West" it is my firm conviction that *Rupert* should have got *Emily* and not *Dorothy*. Therefore my guess is John Holden.

My favorite stories are "The Love Bandit," "Those Lima Eyes," "Seven Footprints to Satan," "Captain Will-o'-the-Wisp," and a great

many others; in fact, all of them. MacIsaac is an artist. Coe, Merritt, Worts, and Lawrence are also good.

Will close with best wishes to the best magazine in the States.

W. S.

SANFORD, MAINE.

Just a short offering. Leave the ARGOSY exactly as it is. As for impossible stories, when we buy fiction we do not expect to get true stories, but something to transport us from every-day, humdrum affairs into the realms of imaginative creation; and how better can we forget every-day troubles than through the works of some vividly imaginative author? I like so many of your stories I will not name them, but for years I have been wondering if ever a sequel to "The Blind Spot" was published. If so, in what number; if not, why not?

S. P.

There was no sequel to "The Blind Spot," by Austin Hall.

SALEM, MASS.

My, but we are having some extra fine stories of late! "Seven Footprints to Satan" was one of the most thrilling stories I've ever read, and what a marvelous movie it would make if played as written and not butchered out of all recognition as the majority of the picturized versions of good stories generally are. Another story that has caused me a great deal of enjoyment is Don Waters's "Pounding the Rails," the sequel to his "Call of Shining Steel." I learned more about railroading in the last one of the stories than if I had studied railroading. If those two stories are to be in book form, I must have them. What a darling man *Zeb* was! He seems real. Is "Moonglow" in book form? I am to be in Savannah next month, and I do want to read the story while on the Hermitage grounds.

MRS. C. Y. H.

"Moonglow" has not as yet appeared in book form.

NEW YORK CITY.

As far as your stories go, I'd say let 'em ride. You can't please every one, but I for one give you and your staff credit for picking real clean stuff, and your line of authors are of the best.

ARGOSY has been with me in every State of the Union, and I expect it will be for years to come.

Has the story, "The Outsider," ever been put in book form? I should like very much to read it again.

W. D. B.

As we have more than once pointed out unless correspondents supply us with the name of the author we cannot reply to their questions concerning stories that have appeared in the past.

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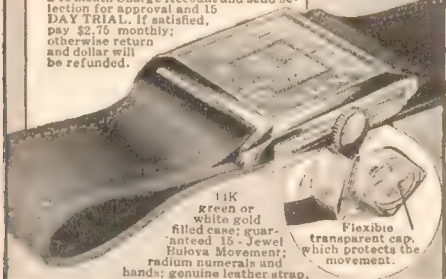
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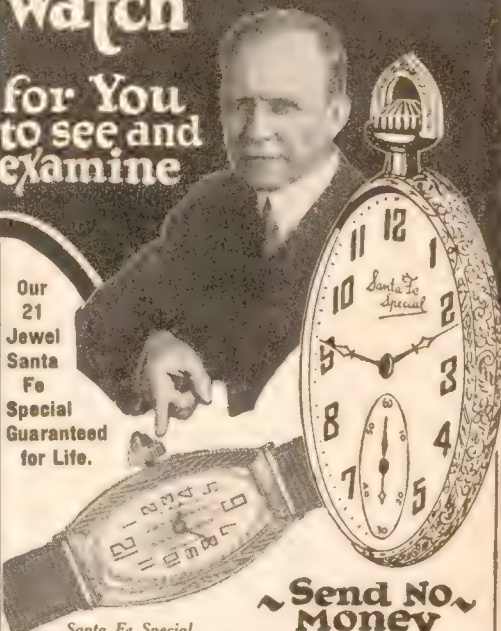
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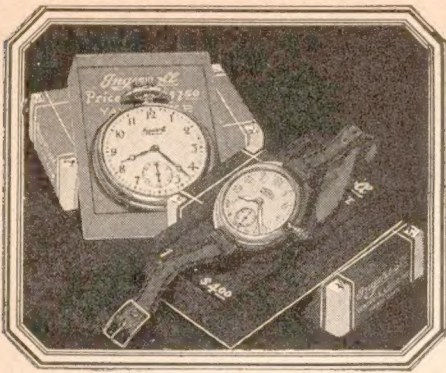
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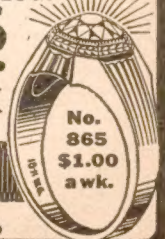
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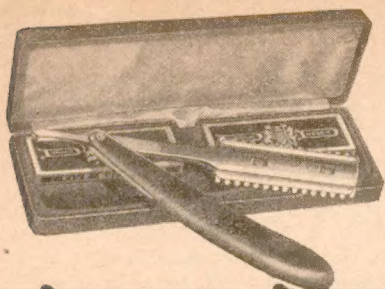
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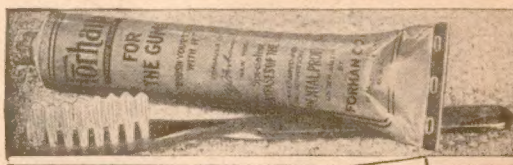
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